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Chapter 1

First Things First

Who are these exercises for?

In the piping world there are a small number of players with talent that amazes us. They seem to have been born with rhythm, music and intensity. Their easy and relaxed appearance when playing belies tremendous underlying strength and agility. It seems that after you teach these people an E doubling, they don't miss one for the rest of their lives. Technique and expression flow from them in a deep and relentless river of music.

These people don't need this book. This book is for the rest of us.

The 141 exercises that follow will be useful for players who fall into one of the following categories:

- advanced beginner
- intermediate
- advanced intermediate
- advanced

That is pretty much everyone except beginners. This is not a tutor for beginners trying to learn pipes from scratch without an instructor. However, piping instructors teaching any level, including beginners, will find tools here for students.

Though anyone in the range of players listed above can benefit from the methodology described here, this book may find its greatest adherents among intermediate pipers who have no access to a regular teacher. These people may find instruction at summer schools or from their band, but generally they are striving to improve in isolation, gleaning tips wherever they can.

Players in the top amateur classes or close to cracking the premier ranks could find just what they need here to bring their playing up that extra notch. Don't let the apparent simplicity of the first few pages put you off. Simplicity is the reason these exercises work.

How and why do they work?

This scenario is common to many practice sessions:

You stand in your practice room, pipes ready to go. "Well, let's try that march again," you say to yourself. "This time I'll play just a little bit faster and I won't slow down in the second part. I'll point the ending a little more like the pipe-major said, and I'll play those birls in the endings stronger. I need to keep the E doublings nice and clear; I need to go from the high A to the low A in the third bar without a squeal. I'll blow steadier, especially on high A, and no way am I going to have any chokes! Oh yeah, and I need to march more naturally and relax a bit more."

What happens? Probably nothing. We grind our way through the tune intensely and maybe a little unenjoyably, solving some of our problems, creating new ones and generally not playing much better than before.

Clearly, a different approach is needed.

Manageable components

We will almost invariably have more success in practice if we try to divide our piping into bite-size bits. Let's call these bits *manageable components*. We'll try to concentrate on each component individually without being distracted by the others.

Maintenance of the instrument is one component. In fact it is a hobby in itself that can be further divided into smaller parts — drones, chanter, etc. Tuning is another. The purely musical side is a third: issues of expression can be addressed away from the cumbersome bagpipe on the practice chanter, or by singing, using a metronome or just plain listening.

Then there is the technical component. This is what we'll examine in the following chapters. Technique is also known as *fingering*, *execution*, *gracenoting* or *embellishments*. It is technique that puts up blocks against our music. So we will focus on it in isolation, away from the bagpipe (mostly) and away from the tunes.

The principle of dividing a problem up into manageable components will be applied even to technique itself. If we have consistent trouble with a certain movement, such as a doubling or a taorluath, we will divide that movement into its component gracenotes to discover if there is one particular finger movement or *pivotal point* that is causing the problem.

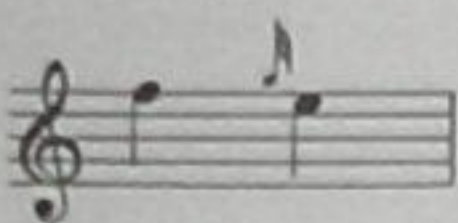
Pivotal points

Over many years of teaching and learning, I have discovered that difficulty with a doubling or a grip or a taorluath usually can be traced to a *single part of the movement* — one gracenote or one note change which is executed inaccurately and therefore causes the rest of the movement to fall apart. This is the *pivotal point* of that embellishment.

Here's the best example I know. Let's say you are having trouble with an E doubling played from F:



Perhaps the doubling is not clear or the movement is just muddled. Almost invariably, the problem with this doubling can be reduced to a failure to properly execute this fundamental embellishment:



This apparently simple G gracenote from F to E has caused much grief. This is the *pivotal point* of this doubling. If we can teach pipers to play a G gracenote accurately from F to E, the rest of the doubling often falls into place with a little fine tuning. This is only one example of a pivotal point. We will encounter more throughout this book.

Rhythmic control

So much for *accuracy*. But there is another element to be integrated into our gracenoting if we are to improve our playing. This is *rhythm*.

If you take a piece of pipe music and mark all the beats with a pencil, you will notice that most of the major pieces of execution fall on a beat. If you go one step further and mark the *offbeats* — the smaller beats between the beats — you will find that most of the remaining pieces of execution fall on these. Embellishments nearly always align themselves with a beat or offbeat.

Take the first part of the traditional 2/4 march, *The Seige of Delhi*. Below, the strong beats are marked with bold arrows, the offbeats with plain arrows:



These arrows show very specifically where the beats and offbeats fall. As you see, many beats fall on embellishments. Look carefully and you'll see that the beats actually fall on specific gracenotes within the embellishments. For example, in gracenote combinations such as doublings, the beat falls on the first gracenote. We shall study this in detail in the chapter on doublings. In the chapter on grips and taorluaths we'll see the beat fall in other places.

Clearly, there is an essential relationship between technique and rhythm. Technique must be played *in rhythm*. In order to get the maximum benefit from playing exercises, *they must always be played in rhythm*.

If we practice technical exercises without a clear and regular rhythm, we may end up playing excellent technique. But our excellent technique may not find its way into the tunes we play. The tunes may end up unmusical because we cannot put our doublings and grips and birls exactly on the beats or offbeats where they belong. Our playing may end up pushed and *a-rhythmic*. We haven't developed *rhythmic control*. To do this, we must play exercises as if we are playing tunes.

This is a crucial concept in this book and it will be described one step at a time as we proceed.

Practising these exercises

The length of time and how often you practise exercises is a matter of preference, though the greater your commitment, the greater the benefit. Some pipers like to play 10-15 minutes of exercises on the chanter before each practice session. Others like to set aside separate and longer blocks of time — perhaps as much 30-45 minutes three or four times a week for two or three months. Even three weekly sessions of 15 minutes each will pay noticeable dividends.

Whatever schedule you devise, either rigorous or more relaxed, try to choose one you can maintain comfortably for a period of time. A limited commitment that you can sustain indefinitely is preferable to an immoderate approach that exhausts itself or bores you silly in three weeks.

Initial progress may be slow as you learn the notes and decide which exercises suit you. With time you will develop a routine and your preferred exercises will become committed to memory.

Improvements can come rapidly and in as little as two weeks. Incentive mounts as benefits accrue. Watch for marked improvements in these fundamentals:

- G gracenotes become crisper, more controlled.
- D gracenotes become smaller and more precise, like G gracenotes.
- G, D and E gracenotes begin to sound the same, varying only in pitch.

- You miss gracenotes and doublings less frequently.
- You make gracenotes with less physical exertion.
- Squeals and other sounds from mis-fingering decrease.
- You gain an increasing sense of being more in control of the chanter.

These small but significant improvements mean that the exercises are working for you.

Below are some other important guidelines to remember as you study and learn.

Embrace simplicity: Complex exercises are not necessarily the best. The simplest gracenote exercises are often the most useful. Just because we have no difficulty making all the gracenotes in an exercise doesn't mean it isn't effective.

Play with focus: If your mind is wandering as you play exercises, take a break. You'll make the most progress when you play exercises with concentration. A rambling, half-minded approach leads to lazy, half-baked technique.

Keep the beat: Unless you play exercises with controlled rhythm — tapping your foot as you would in a tune — you will get less than their full benefit.

Faster is not better: Speed is never the goal when playing exercises. Strive for precision, consistency and rhythmic accuracy.

Easy does it : Exercises work the hands hard. When played immoderately, they can strain muscles. If, over the course of some days, your hands feel sore, or if your playing is getting worse instead of better, take a day or two off.

Pipes or chanter?

Your best exercise work will be done on the practice chanter, particularly a 'long' practice chanter on which the spacing between the holes is the same as on the pipe chanter. You may certainly play exercises on the pipes if you like. Suffice it to say that you must be in excellent control of an exercise on the practice chanter before you will benefit from playing it on pipes.

Also, be forewarned that exercises on the bagpipe may drive innocent listeners to uncustomary behaviour.

Using a metronome with these exercises

An increasing number of pipers are realizing the benefits of using a metronome to improve rhythm and expression, either by singing or playing tunes to it. Many advanced beginners and intermediate-level players like to play exercises to a

metronome. Others detest it. If playing to the metronome is not your cup of tea (it isn't mine), you can use the metronome simply to guide your tempo before you start.

Tempo symbols

To the top right of each exercise in this book, there are numbers indicating tempo range. They look like this:

42-84 / 84-168

In this case, the first two numbers, 42-84, mean that the slowest you should play the exercise is 42 beats per minute and the fastest is 84 beats per minute. The second set of numbers, 84-168, is the same tempo range provided in *double* time. (Multiply each of the first two numbers by 2 and you get the second two numbers.) Double time means that the metronome is marking both the beats and the offbeats. You will be encouraged to set the metronome to double time and instructed how to use it. You may find double-timing particularly useful if the single-time tempo is so slow you can't follow the beat. Double-timing will often help you keep the beat better. It will also help you to understand the rhythmic structure of an exercise (or a tune). These advantages will be explained as we go.

In some cases you will see numbers that look like this:

36-76 / (x3)108-228

The "x3" symbol will be given when the exercise is written in 6/8 time. It means that the second set of numbers is the same tempo range as the first, but in *triple* time. Specifically, this means that a group of three eighth notes which would receive one beat in single-time receives three beats (one for each eighth note) in triple time. If that sounds complicated, don't worry. That's as complicated as this book will get.

You may also see a tempo range given in this form:

44-120/(x3)132-xxx

This means that when triple-timing on the metronome, the upper-range numbers are too high to be useful. Use triple time at the low end of the range up to whatever triple-time tempo you find useful.

Begin at the low end of the suggested range and move upward as you feel comfortable. As noted earlier, there is little benefit and may be some harm to exceeding the maximum suggested tempo, or playing faster than you can handle comfortably. In most cases, upper-range tempos are those of a top professional or a piper in a Grade 1 band

pushing hard. Even if you can play this quickly with no difficulty, it is rarely the best tempo at which to work on your technique. A middling, comfortable tempo is almost always the best, no matter how good the player.

You may also not use the metronome at all if you wish.

Be your own metronome

Don't become a slave to the metronome. A metronome will help instill your piping with rhythm and tempo, but ultimately you must be able to maintain these without the metronome. Use the metronome as a guide and as a teacher, but practise generating your own rhythm and tempo as well.

One warning about metronomes: the wind-up, pendulum style is notoriously inaccurate. If at all possible, use one of the electronic metronomes widely available on the market. Even with an electronic machine it is worthwhile using a stopwatch to count the number of beats per minute periodically to ensure that the metronome is accurate.

Using the demonstration recording

The recording that accompanies this book provides demonstrations only. It is meant to let you hear how the technique and the exercises actually sound. In most cases, only part of the exercise is played on the CD – just a few bars so you can hear what you are aiming for. The metronome is provided to show you how the beats and offbeats fit into the exercise. An exercise may be demonstrated in more than one tempo as the sound of an embellishment may change dramatically with increased speed.

I don't encourage you to play along with the recording. For one thing, the exercises are rarely played in their entirety. Secondly, playing along can hide imperfections in your own playing so that you may miss things that need work. Play by yourself and face your strengths and weaknesses squarely.

Bands may wish to try some of these exercises as a unit to get technique sounding together, but the best work will be done by individual players on practice chanters, using the recording as a guide only.

There is a track break on the CD after every 10 exercises to help you move to different locations easily.

First exercises: note changes

Our first exercise is simple enough. It has no gracenotes at all. But within it is the fundamental fingerwork for all the playing we do. It contains all possible changes from one note to any other note on the Highland bagpipe scale.

In all note changes where more than one finger is moving, you must be aware of which fingers should leave or hit the chanter at the same time. This is the foundation for all technique and it is especially important in gracenoting. It is so important that you should read this paragraph again.

For example, when going from low G to F, the low A, E and F fingers must be lifted at exactly the same time. Conversely, when going from F to low G, these three fingers must hit the chanter at exactly the same time.

In the first exercise below, focus on fingers leaving and hitting the chanter at the same time. Play the exercise with each note the same length and with an even tempo; tap your foot. Above all, be sure fingers are moving simultaneously when they are supposed to.

The exercise is written in 2/4 time. There are two beats in a bar; the beat falls on the first note in each pair. If you set your metronome to double time, there will be a click for every note.

1

42-84 / 84-168



At first attempt, the notes in the exercise may seem confusing, but you will soon catch on. This type of pattern contains all combinations of the technique being addressed; it will become familiar as you proceed through the book.

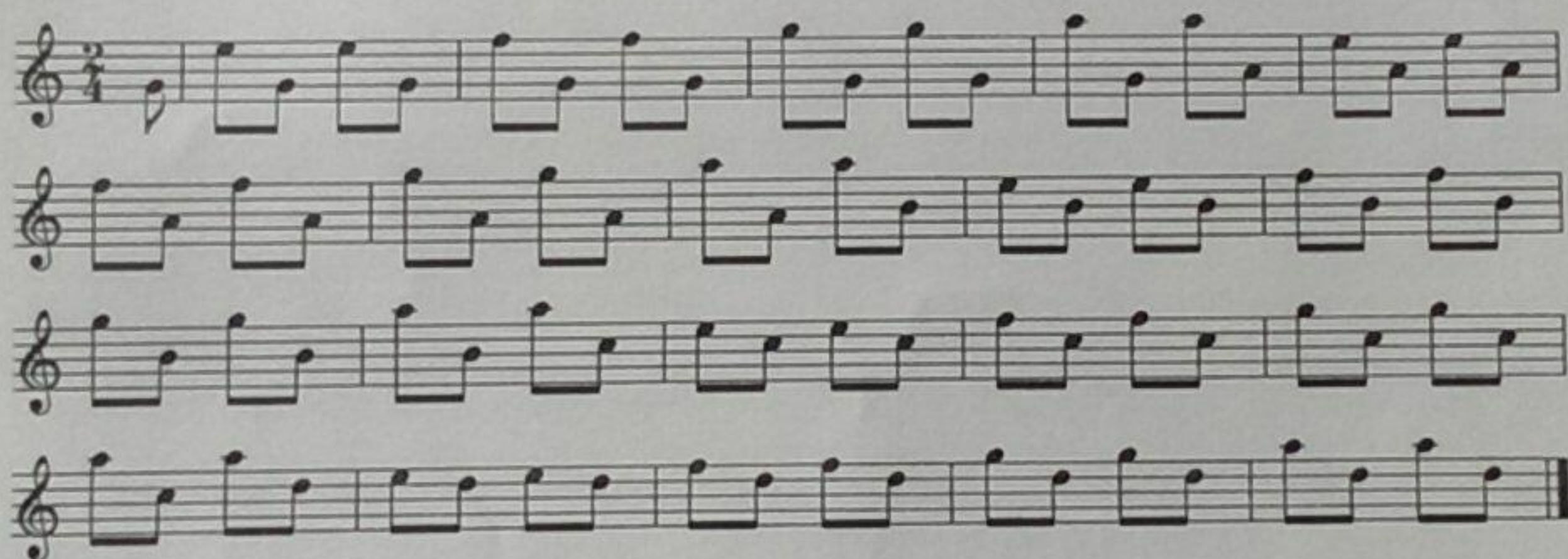
Hand changes and crossing noises

While the above exercise contains all possible note changes on the highland bagpipe, the next one is concerned with note changes between hands. These are the nemesis of many pipers because they breed a dreaded virus: the *crossing noise*. A crossing noise sounds like a tiny 'blip' between two notes. It occurs when the fingers playing one note arrive on the chanter before the fingers playing the next note leave it. For example, if you go from C to E and your B and C fingers touch the chanter before the E finger lifts, you hear a crossing noise. The reverse can also happen when going down from E to C, if the E finger hits the chanter too soon.

This is an excellent exercise for catching crossing noises, and a good warm-up for any exercise session.

2

42-84 / 84-168

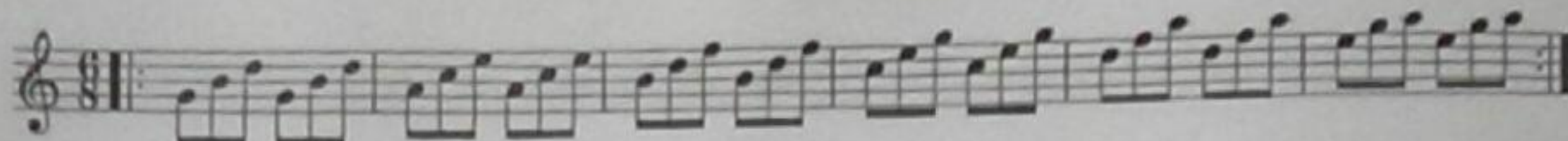


Note groupings

Now we'll combine some common note changes into groups of three notes. Again, it's important to play these evenly (every note the same length) and with a definite foot-tapping rhythm. These are in 6/8 time, which means there are two beats in a bar and the beat falls on the first note of each three-note grouping. In these exercises, the suggested slow tempo is nearly too slow to play to the metronome. This is a good reason to switch to the triple-time range. There will then be one click per note. Continue, if you can, to tap your foot only on the first note in each group. Listen for crossing noises!

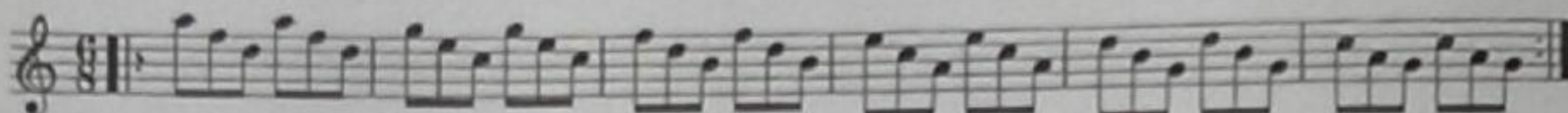
3

36-76 / (x3) 108-xxx



4

36-76 / (x3) 108-xxx

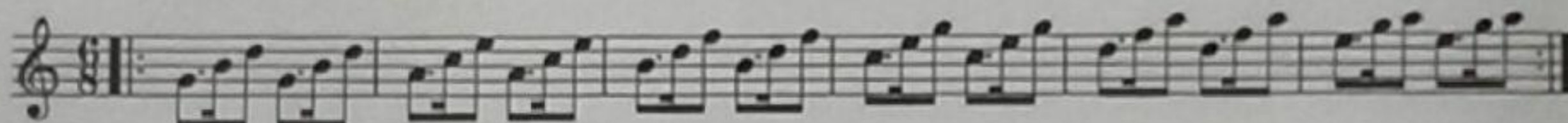


'Tune conditions'

Any time we can make an exercise seem more like a tune — to simulate 'tune conditions' — we improve our ability to transfer our technical improvements from the exercises to actual tunes. The above two exercises can be made more like a march simply by pointing the first note in each grouping as you would in a 6/8 march. Playing this in triple time is a bit tricky. Listen to the recording and then try singing the exercise to the metronome until you feel comfortable with it. (Singing can be a great way to understand an exercise or tune without the encumbrance of confused fingers.)

5

36-76 / (x3) 108-xxx



Now let's get a bit creative. Go back and try to play exercise #4 with the same pointing used in #5.

Chapter 2

Single Gracenoting

Playing a gracenote from one note *up* to a higher one differs from playing that gracenote *down* to a lower note. For this reason, we will examine G, D and E gracenotes going up and then down.

These three gracenotes make up the majority of embellishments in Highland piping, either by themselves or combined into doublings and other movements. (The high A gracenote is also on the list of common gracenotes, but it is limited in range and will be covered here along with the G gracenote.)

Earlier, I stated that the complexity of an exercise is no indication of its effectiveness. Although these single-gracenote exercises are the least complex patterns in this book, they are by far the most important. Just by playing the G, D and E exercises provided here, your doublings, grips, taorluaths and general level of play will improve noticeably.

Regardless of your level of experience, I suggest you spend from 30 to 50 *per cent* of your exercise practice time playing the single-gracenote exercises in this chapter.

G gracenote – up

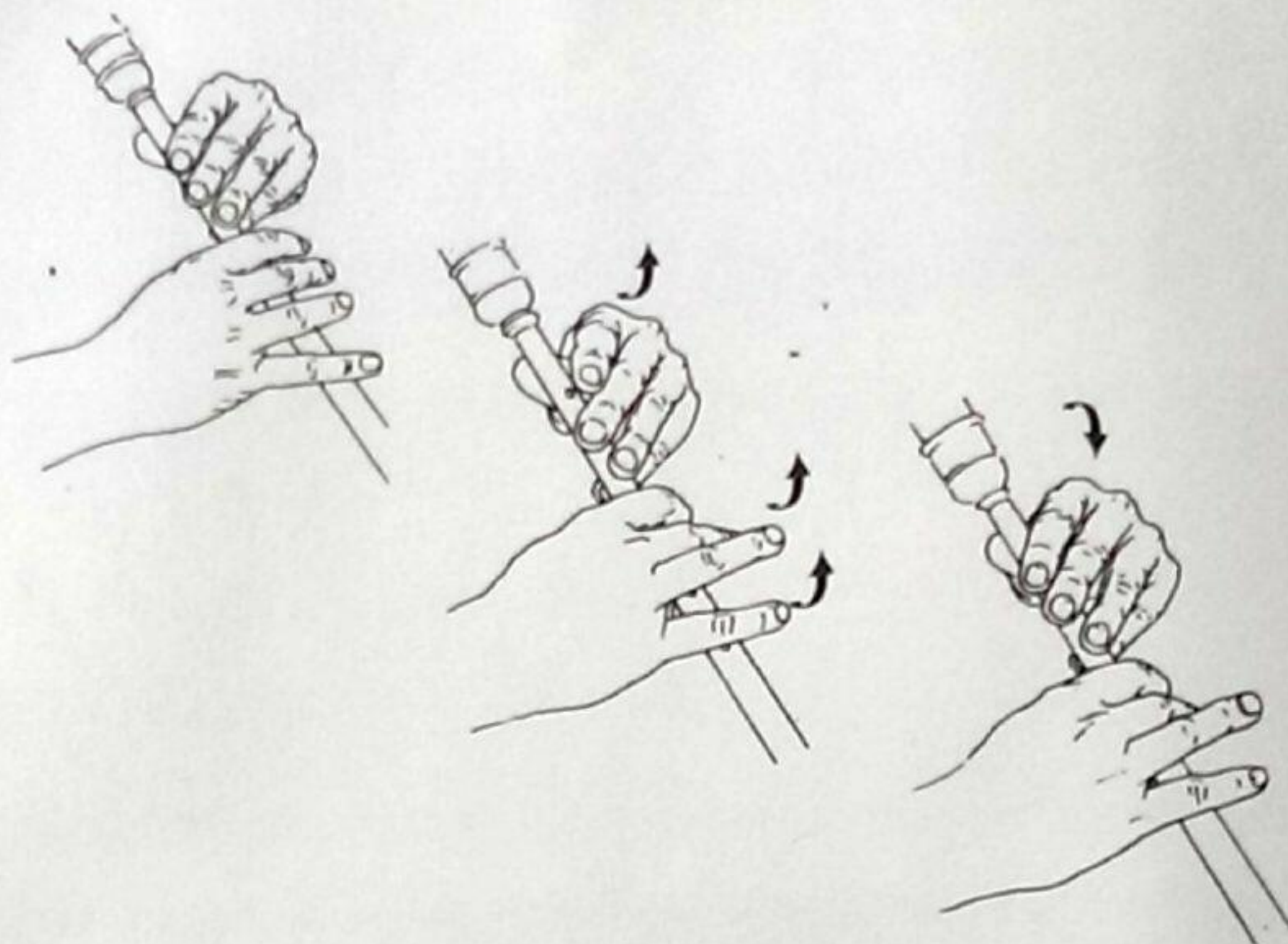
The first goal in executing a G (or any) gracenote is accuracy. This is often referred to as playing the gracenote 'on the note'. It means that the high G finger playing the gracenote must lift from the chanter at the same time as the fingers for the note being moved to.

For example, to start on low A and play a G gracenote up to B:

- Lift the **high** G and B fingers at exactly the same time.
- Return **high** G finger to the chanter crisply to complete the gracenote.

See Figure 1.

Figure 1



This simultaneous lifting of the fingers is the *pivotal point* of the G gracenote going up. It will become extremely important when we move on to doublings.

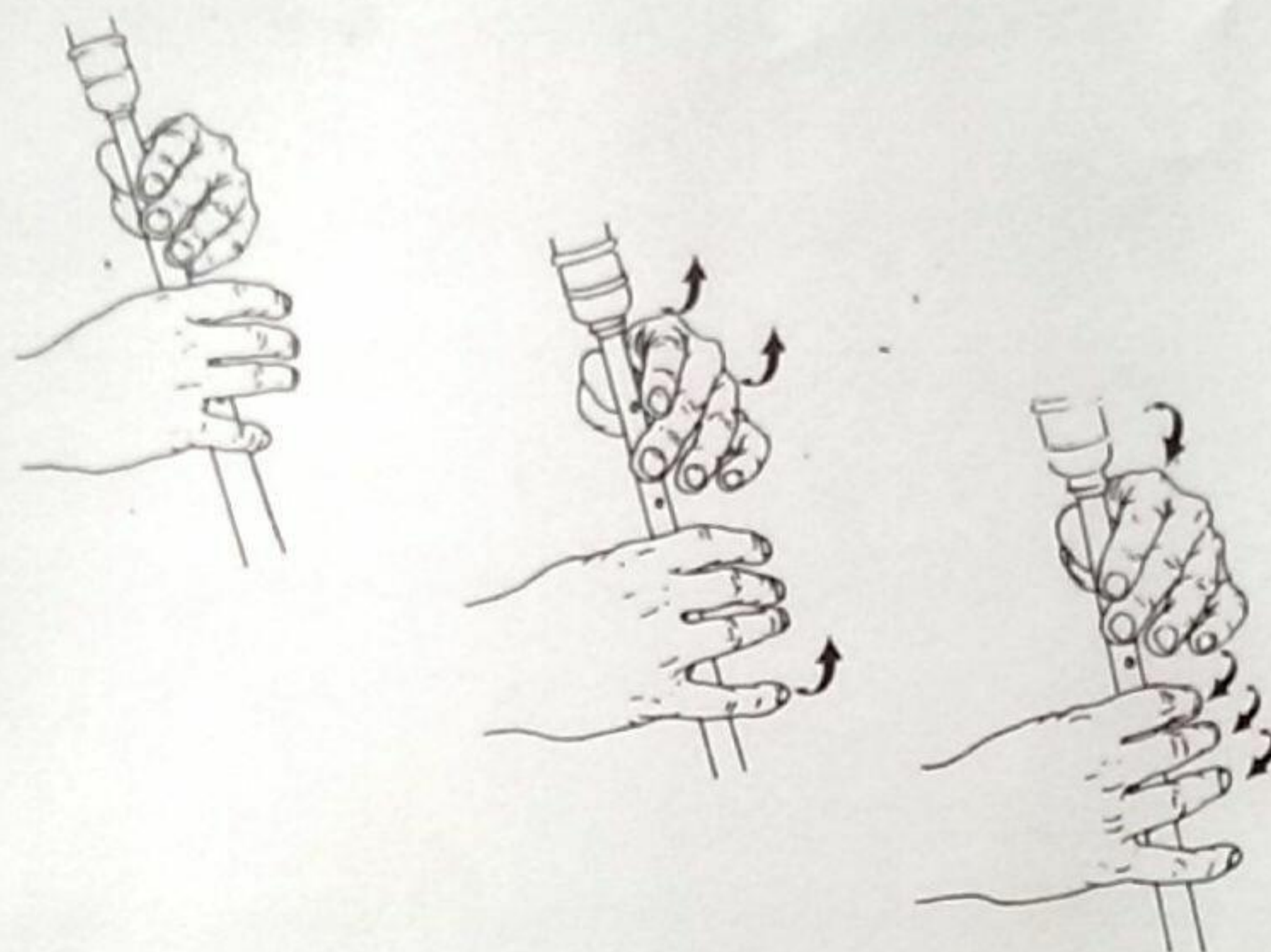
By returning the finger 'crisply' I mean that the G finger must not come too high off the chanter or remain up for very long. Lifting the G finger too high may help at first until you get the idea, but you must soon strive for a smaller, firmer gracenote. Listen to the recording for the proper sound of the G gracenote.

Here is another example. To move from D to E with a G gracenote, you are switching hands and two things must happen at once. Starting on D:

- Lift the **high** G, E and **low** A fingers at the same time.
- Return the **high** G finger crisply to the chanter at the same time as the D, C and B fingers.

See Figure 2.

Figure 2



Be careful: if the three bottom-hand fingers hit the chanter too early, you will make a crossing noise.

This is a lot to do all at once if you are not accustomed to it. If one particular note change is a problem for you, practise it by itself. You may wish to practise particular note changes by themselves until you can play them cleanly.

On the beat

As discussed in the last chapter, it is extremely important to play technique in rhythm, or 'on the beat'. To play a gracenote on the beat, the finger playing the gracenote should *hit* the chanter at exactly the same time as your foot hits the floor or the metronome clicks the beat. The exercises in this chapter are written so that the technique falls on the beat. Some embellishments must be played on the offbeat or upbeat (the beat between the beats), but more on this later.

The first exercise will look familiar from Chapter 1, but now G gracenotes have been added. This exercise contains all instances of a G gracenote played from one note to a

higher one. It's in 2/4 time, so the beat falls on the first note of each pair. Focus on playing these gracenotes *accurately, crisply and on the beat*.

6

42-84 / 84-168



You probably noticed the high A gracenotes. These follow the same principles as the high G gracenote. For example, to go from low G to high G with a high A gracenote you'll need to lift a whopping five fingers at once. Start on low G:

- Lift high A, high G, F, E and low A at the same time.
- Put the high A finger down crisply to complete the gracenote.

Let's add some pointing to #6. As will happen a number of times in this book, you will be asked to play something for which you don't have the music. This is to start you on the road to creating your own exercises or changing these ones to suit your own needs. In #7, below, you will see the first few bars of #6 written with some simple pointing. Apply this pointing to the notes in #6

Don't overdo the pointing. The short notes are meant to be clear and well articulated. Don't rush off them or you'll commit the cardinal sin (in this book, anyway) of *hitting the gracenote ahead of the beat*. This is aptly named 'rushing.'

7

42-84 / 84-168



Here are two classic G gracenote 'up' exercises. Again, the notes are the same in both, but the first is written even and the second is pointed.

8

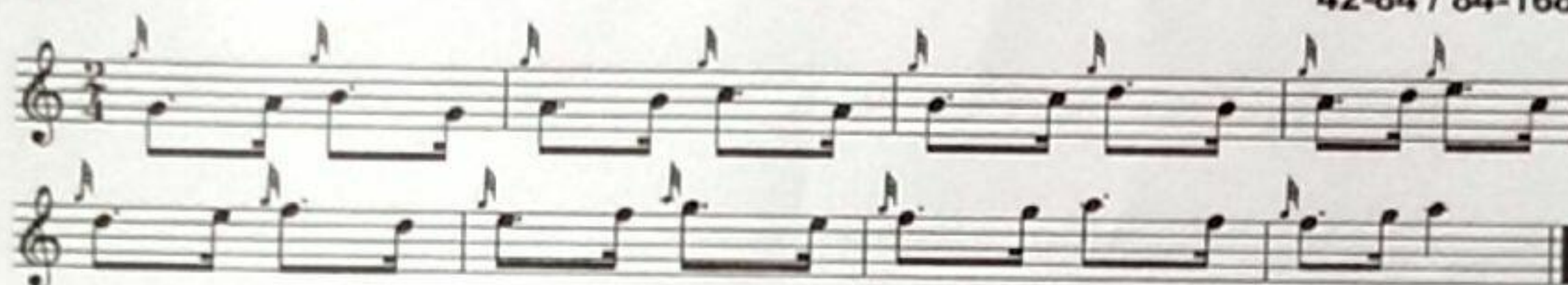
42-84 / 84-168



Be careful in #9 not to over-cut the short notes or rush the beat.

9

42-84 / 84-168



G gracenote – down

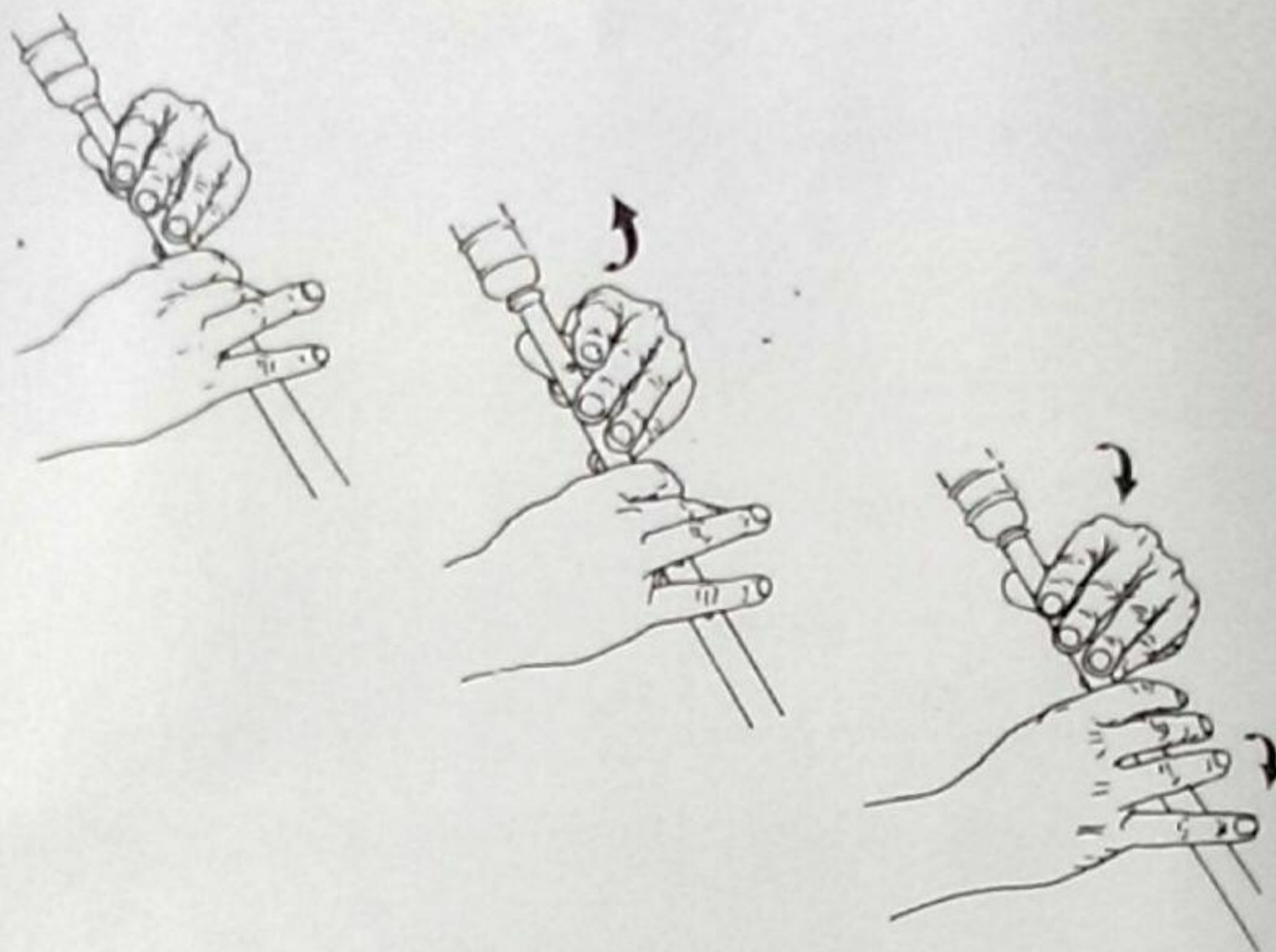
To play the gracenote accurately when going from one note *down* to a lower one, we must make fingers hit the chanter at the same time.

For example, to play a G gracenote from B down to low A, start on B:

- Lift the **high** G finger a very small distance from the chanter.
- Bring the **high** G and the B fingers down crisply at exactly the same time.

It is important not to lift the gracenote finger too high off the chanter – certainly not as high as the B finger. In fact, when this is executed well, the B finger may actually begin to move down toward the chanter as the G finger starts to come up. The pivotal point, again, is in both fingers *hitting* the chanter at the same time. See Figure 3.

Figure 3



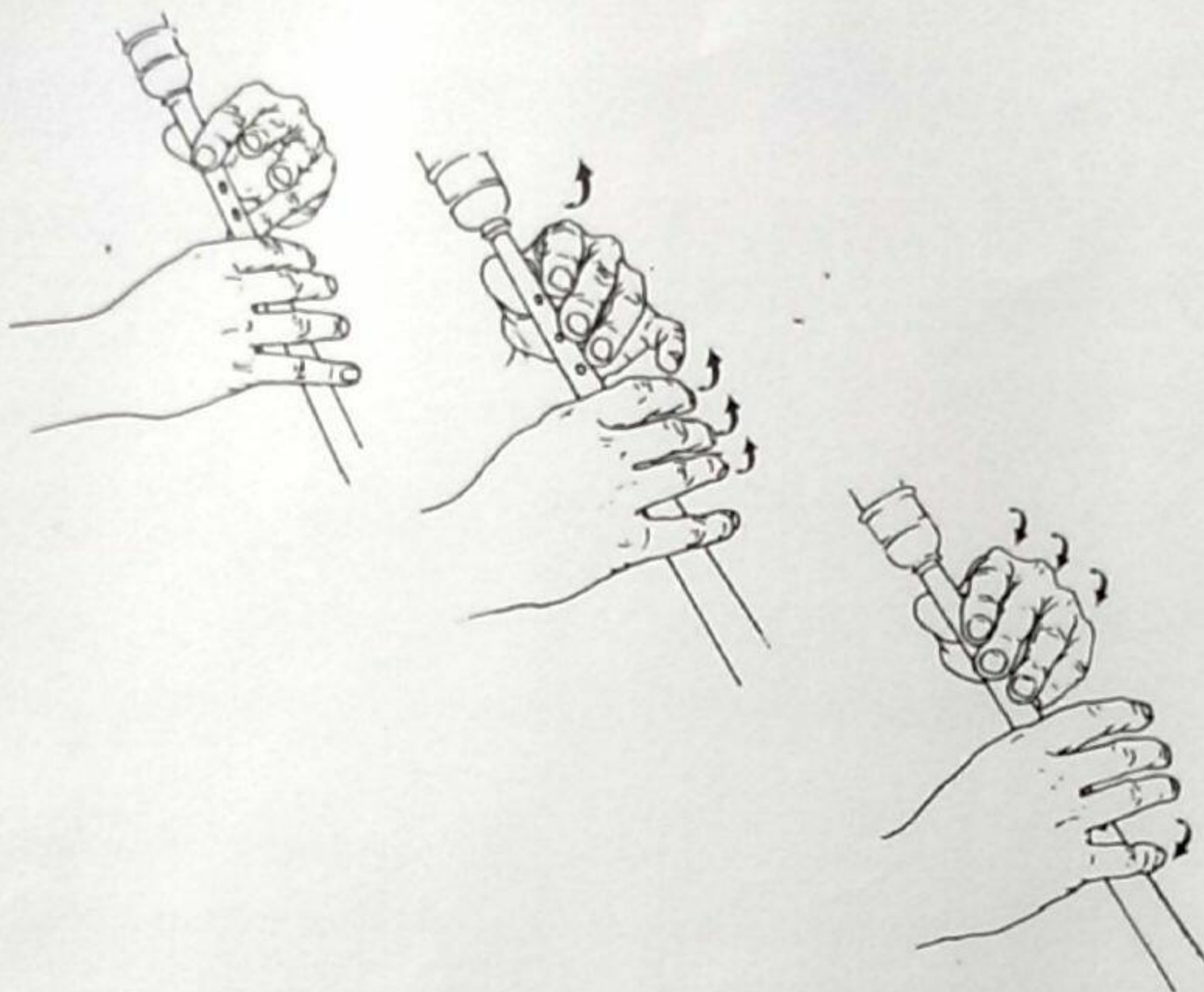
Another example: to play a G **gracenote** down from F to D, you are switching hands. Begin on F:

- Lift the **high G** finger a short distance along with the D, C and B.*
- Return the **high G** finger crisply to the chanter along with the F, E and low A .

** More advanced players may find that the D, C and B fingers actually lift from the chanter slightly later than the G gracenote. This is quite correct as long as no crossing noises occur. However, the above guideline provides a solid basis for a clean note change.*

See Figure 4.

Figure 4



Note that if the D, C and B fingers lift too late, you will make a crossing noise.

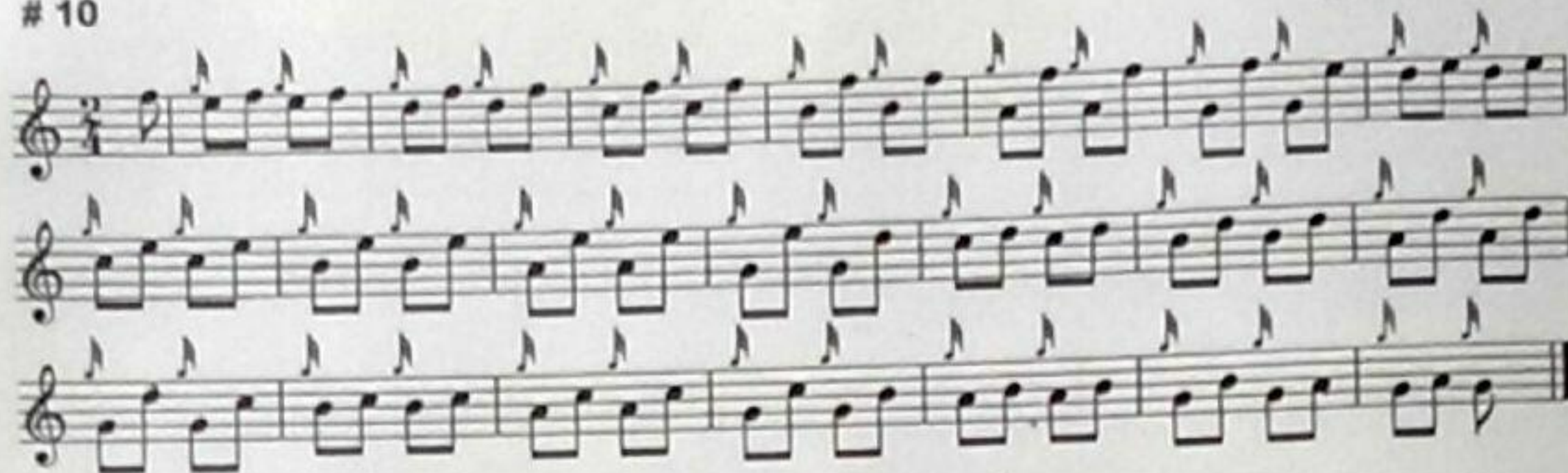
On the beat

As before, the gracenote must be played on the *beat* as well as on the *note*. This means that all fingers hitting the chanter do so at exactly the same time as your foot hits the floor or the metronome clicks the beat. Of course, this implies that the gracenote begins slightly ahead of the beat. This is true, but don't focus on it. Focus on the finger *hitting* the chanter.

Exercise #10 contains all possible instances of a G gracenote played from one note down to a lower one. Try to play these gracenotes *accurately, crisply* and *on the beat*. Play the exercise evenly. Be sure the appropriate fingers are hitting the chanter at the same time.

10

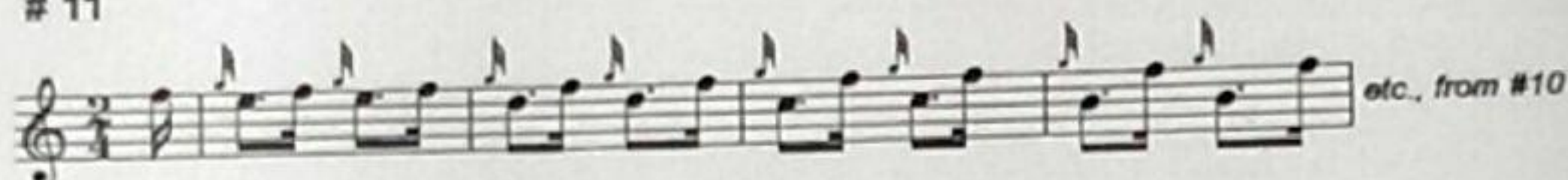
42-84 / 84-168



Now we'll add add pointing in #11. Don't play the short notes too short; this is called 'crushing' them. Listen to the recording to hear how these notes are articulated.

11

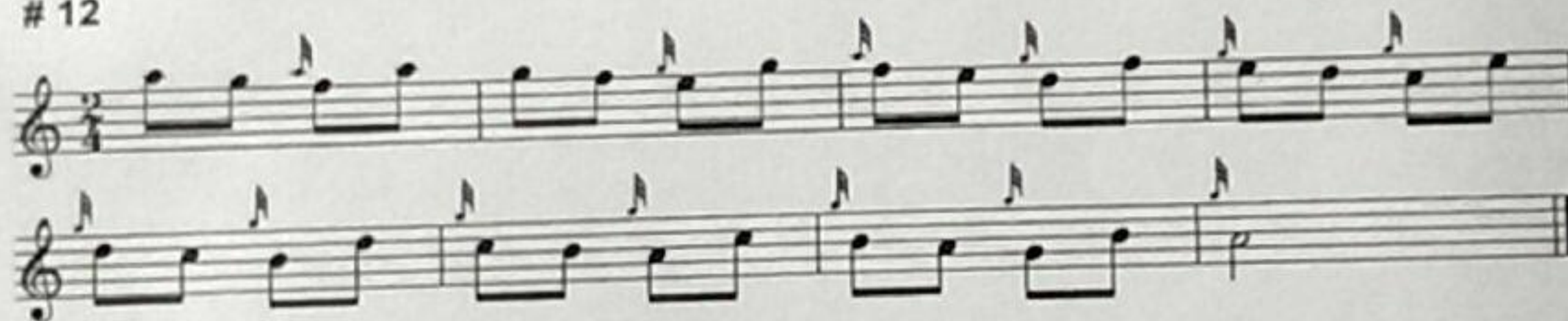
42-84 / 84-168



The next two exercises are 'down' versions of #8 and #9. Play them with control, accuracy and rhythm.

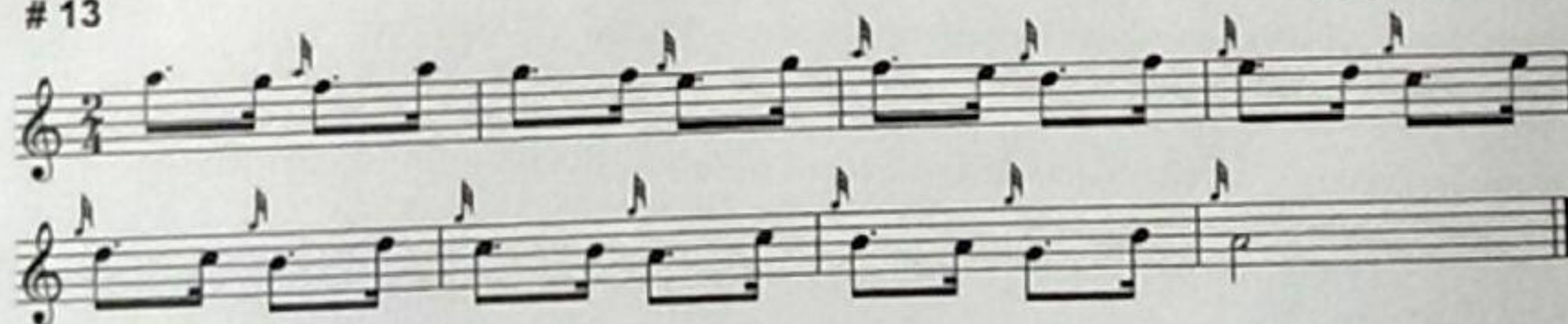
12

42-84 / 84-168



13

42-84 / 84-168



On the offbeat

To complete the G gracenote section, here is a scale played both up and down with high G (or high A) gracenotes. All previous guidelines apply, with one added wrinkle. I mentioned earlier that in pipe music the gracenotes and movements tend to gravitate toward beats and offbeats. So far we've been concerned with beats. Now we'll see some gracenotes on offbeats – the beats between the beats.

Below, #14 is written in 2/4 time. The beat falls, as usual, on the first note in each pair. The offbeat falls on the *second* note of each pair. The offbeat is often called the *upbeat* because you can tap your foot in such a way that the offbeat occurs when your foot lifts from the floor.

To help you, I've marked all the beats with arrows; strong beats are highlighted, offbeats are not. If you set your metronome to the double-time tempo given, your metronome will mark beats and offbeats. If you play the exercise evenly and rhythmically, you will *feel* the offbeats.

14

52-84 / 104-168



E gracenote – up

You have probably found that your E gracenote does not respond as freely as your high G; the finger is not as strong and agile. But it is a very trainable finger. With work it will play an E gracenote nearly as crisply as the G.

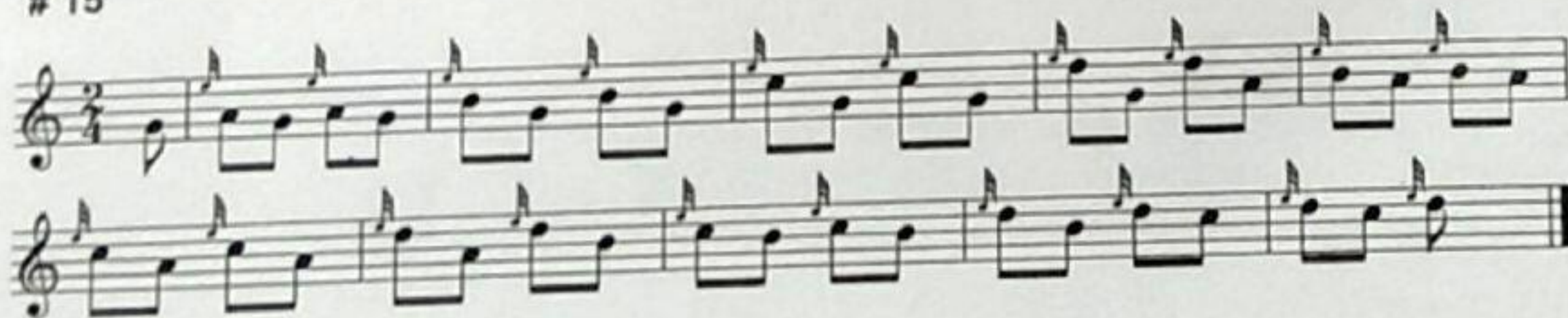
The rules of gracenoting as described in the G gracenote sections apply to the E.

Remember that as you change notes with gracenotes, fingers must *leave* or *hit* the chanter at the same time. This is the *pivotal point* of all gracenoting.

E gracenotes can only be played on bottom-hand notes, so the exercises are shorter. In #15, you will encounter all possible contexts of the E gracenote played 'up'.

15

42-84 / 84-168



Now, on to the pointed version. Because the E finger is weaker than the high G, there will be a greater temptation to hit the gracenote early, slightly ahead of the beat, and therefore play the short note too short. Don't do this; wait for the beat.

16

42-84 / 84-168



As you become more comfortable playing the E gracenote accurately on the note and on the beat, try to give it the same cracking crispness you give to the high G gracenote. This will become easier as the finger strengthens.

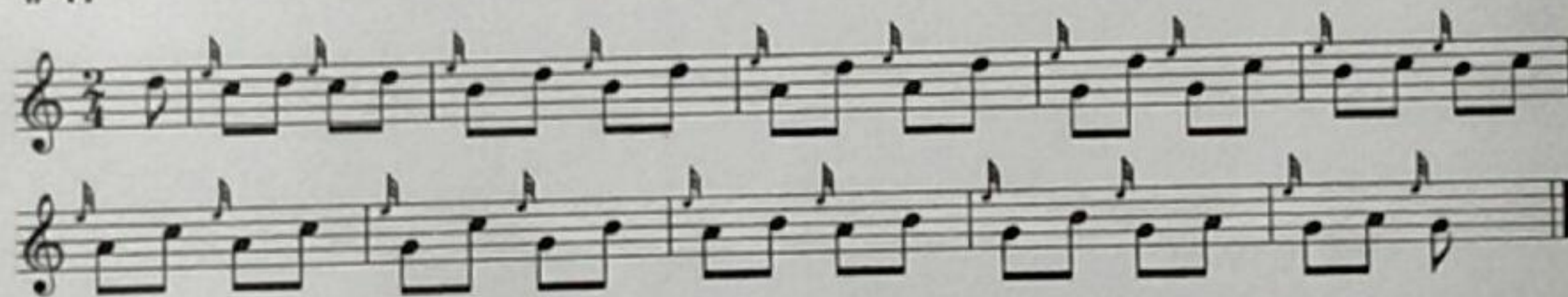
E gracenote — down

Now we're back to fingers hitting the chanter at the same time. This is where the inherent weakness of the E finger becomes most apparent. The next few exercises will tax this finger and might even hurt a bit at first.

Once again, I cannot overstress how important it is that all falling fingers hit the chanter at *exactly* the same time.

17

42-84 / 84-168



Here's the same exercise with pointing.

18

42-84 / 84-168



Next is an E gracenote scale combining 'up' and 'down' gracenotes. It is followed by its pointed brother.

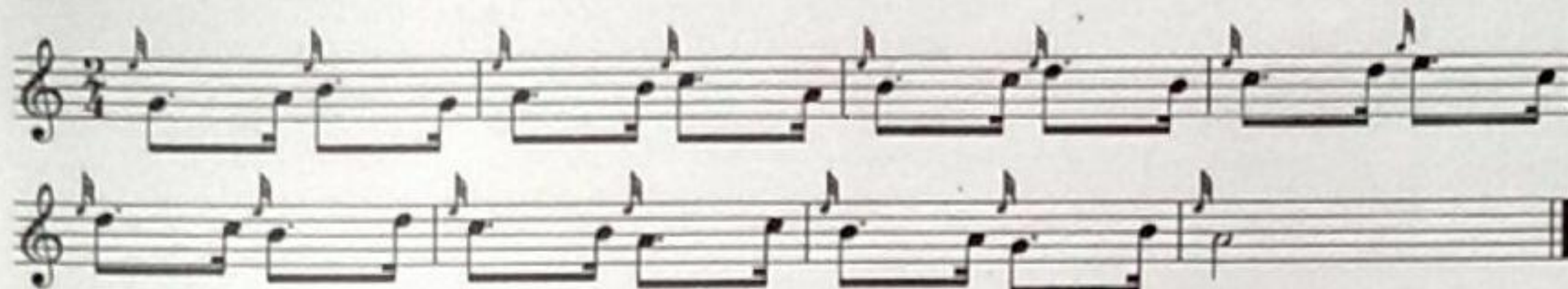
19

42-84 / 84-168



20

42-84 / 84-168



Here is a great exercise for building E-finger strength.

21

52-84 / 104-168



D gracenote – up

The D gracenote can be challenging. The index finger of the right hand is a strong finger, but the positioning of the bottom hand, with the thumb behind the chanter (see page 41, can make the D gracenote feel awkward.

Don't let this awkwardness distract you from the pivotal point, which, in this case, is where fingers hit the chanter at the same time.

To play a D gracenote from low A to C, start on low A:

- Lift the D, C and B fingers at the same time.
- Bring the D and low A fingers down crisply together.*

* Note that it is quite acceptable in this particular note change for the low A finger to hit the chanter a bit earlier than the D. It's the simultaneous going up that is crucial.

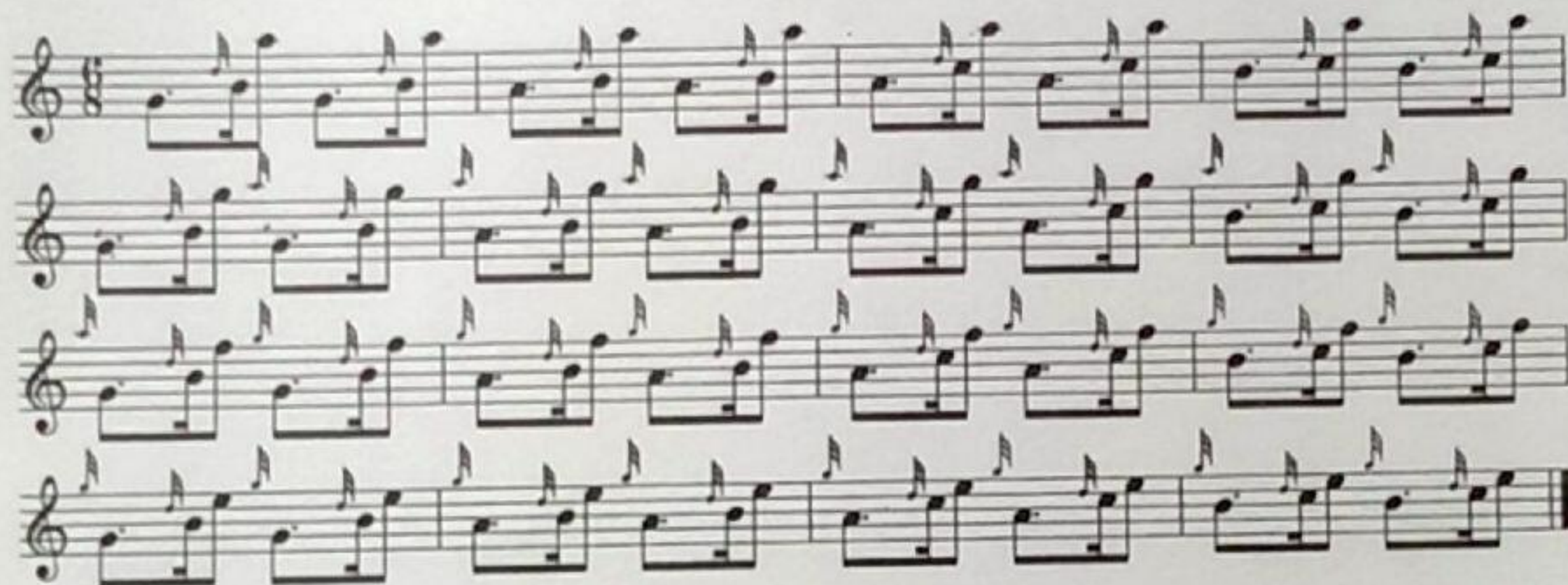
See Figure 5.

The next exercise is a very practical pattern. It is a typical 6/8-time application of the D gracenote as a 'riser' after a beat note. However, unlike our work so far, the beat does not fall on the D gracenote, but on the first note in each group of three. This is also very typical. You may, if you wish, ignore the G and high A gracenotes to focus on the D gracenote alone.

Play the exercise with rhythm and accuracy. Articulate the short note clearly. If you try it in triple time, listen to the recording for the proper placement of the beats. It can be a bit tricky.

23

38-76 / (x3) 114-xxx



If you find this exercise difficult, you may wish to begin by playing it evenly, with no pointing — every note the same length — before moving on to the printed version.

D gracenote — down

This is the only gracenote in piping that is sometimes given its own name — *tachum*. The often fearsome tachum is in reality nothing more complicated than a D gracenote played from one note down to another.

For example, to play a D gracenote from C down to low A, start on C:

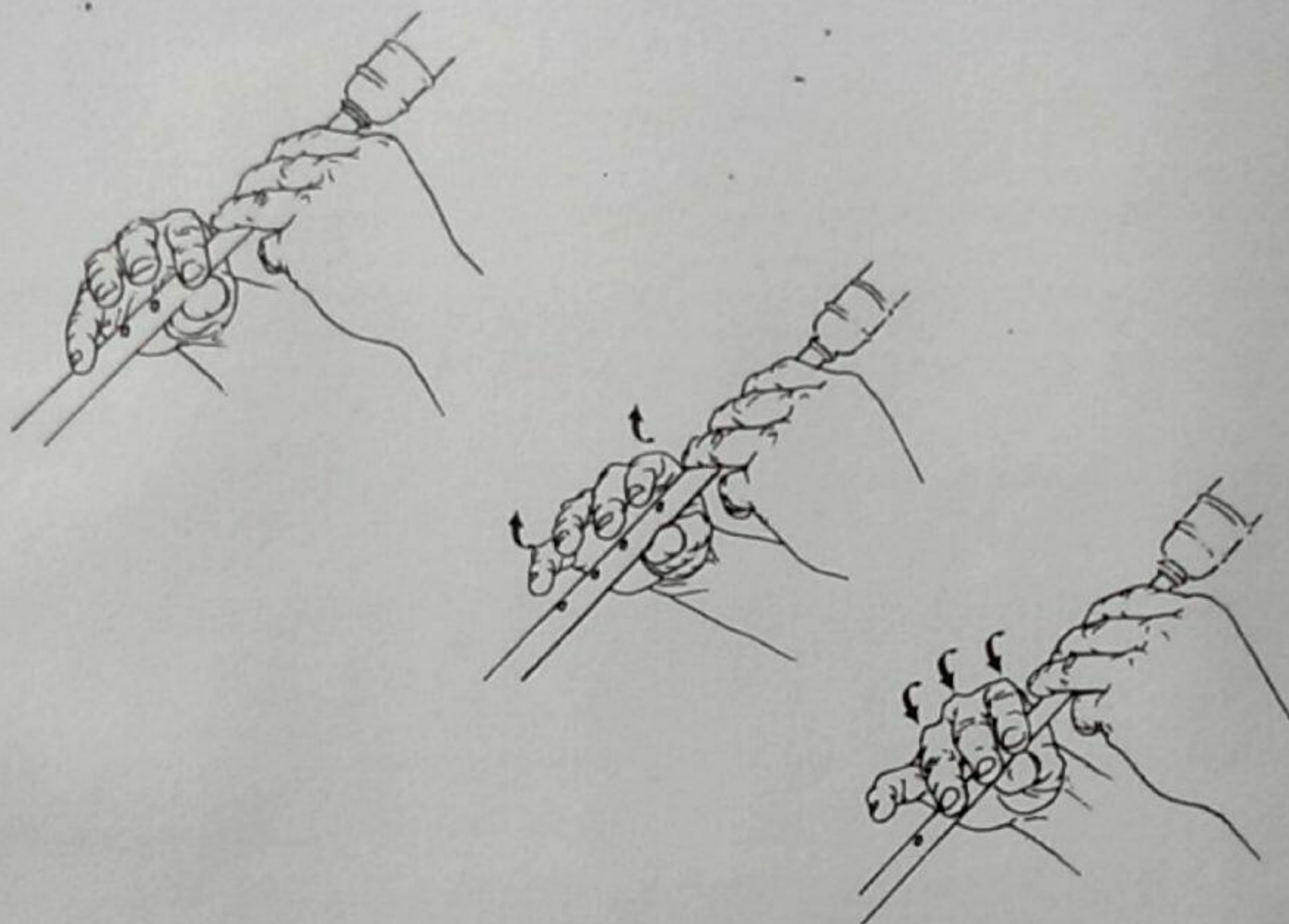
- Lift the D finger.
- As you begin to bring the D, C and B fingers down, lift the low A finger*.
- Bring the D, C and B fingers down crisply together.

*You may well find that your low A finger does this naturally. The tachum is one of the few patterns where a finger may follow its own schedule. See the description preceding Figure 5, above, for another.

It is important to note that the D gracenote finger does not rise off the chanter as high as the C and B fingers. The C and B may in fact be coming down as the D goes up. They meet along the way and hit the chanter together.

See Figure 6.

Figure 6

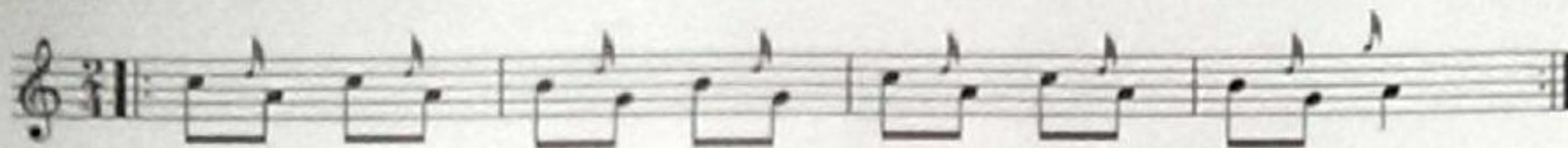


This all sounds more complicated than it is. Concentrate on a crisp gracenote and the fingers hitting the chanter together. Much of the rest will happen on its own.

Below, #24 is played evenly — no pointing. Notice that the beat is on the *first* note in each pair. It is *not* on the D gracenote. This is very important: *D gracenotes down rarely occur on the beat*. We'll see this in examples later. Play this exercise slowly and rhythmically. Make sure fingers are hitting the chanter at the same time.

24

48-84 / 96-168



Now add the G gracenote, which is on the beat.

25

48-84 / 96-168

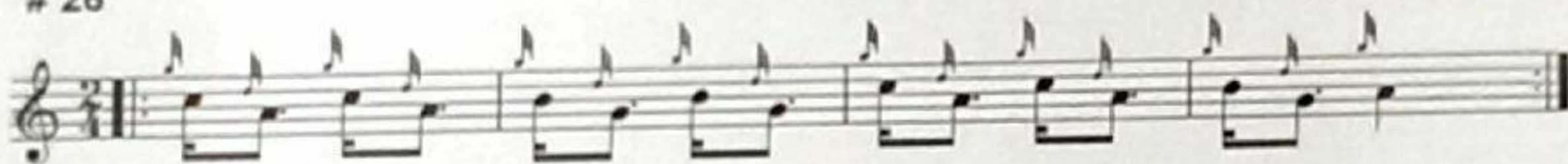


Now we'll add some pointing to turn this gracenote into a true *tachum* – a short C or B on the beat followed by a D gracenote down. 'Tachum', pronounced *tá-kum*, is a very descriptive word in that we play the movement just the way we say the word. The accent (beat) is on the first syllable – *ta*-chum. Don't play the movement any faster than you can say the word, and don't over-cut the short note. This short note is on the beat, which means it must be clear and well articulated. Keep the D gracenote firm – *ta*-chum.

Remember: the beat is on the first note in each pair.

26

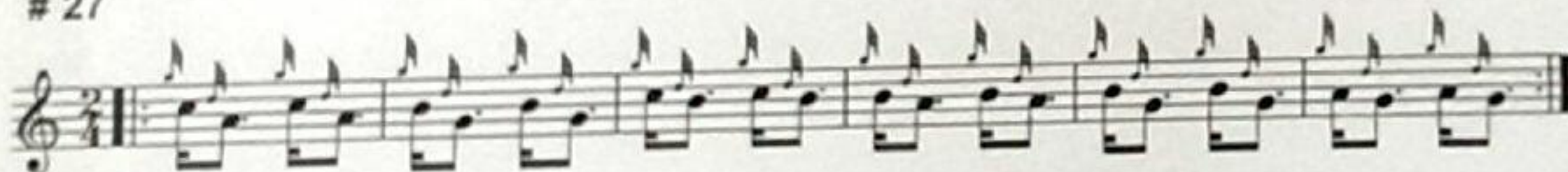
48-84 / 96-168



Finally, here is a variation on #25 with additional note combinations.

27

48-84 / 96-168



Tune simulation

It is important to practise the *tachum* movement in a tune-like context. The next group of exercises will help you play *tachums* in marches, where they are very common.

The first is in 6/8 time. The beat falls on the first note in each group of three. Point the dotted note as you would in a 6/8 march, but don't over-clip the short note – it is the well-articulated *ta* in *ta*-chum. Focus on the D gracenote.

28

38-76 / (x3) 114-xxx

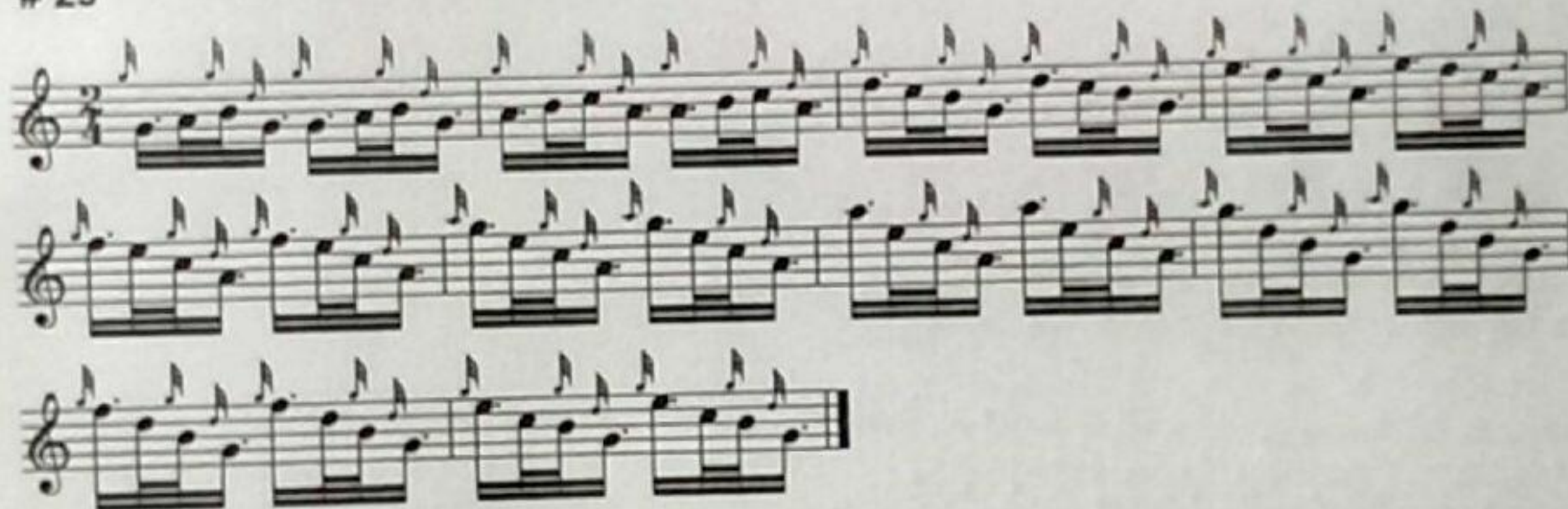


The next exercise will be handled best by advanced pipers, but the less experienced will find it valuable if they play it slowly. It is written in 2/4 time, in the pattern of a competition march. If you play in piping competitions, this exercise is a must. The demanding upper tempo given is that of a Grade 1 competition band playing a 2/4 march. As with most of the upper tempos in this book, don't worry if you can't achieve it. It is the realm of very advanced players.

The beat falls on the first note in each group of four. The offbeat falls on the third note, which is also the short note of the tachum movement. To understand the offbeat better, try tapping your foot or setting your metronome double time. You now get a beat or click on each beat and offbeat — the first and third notes of each group. Be careful not to rush the offbeat; this would mean you're playing the tachum early. Listen to the recording carefully to get the right sense of the pointing.

40-84 / 80-168

29



The next exercise is also a common 2/4-march pattern that is good for tachums in general. Again, it may help to double-time the beats (four in a bar) until you feel comfortable. However, you should eventually play the exercise with only two beats in a bar to become accustomed to playing tachums on the offbeat, which is how they usually appear in tunes.

40-84 / 80-168

30



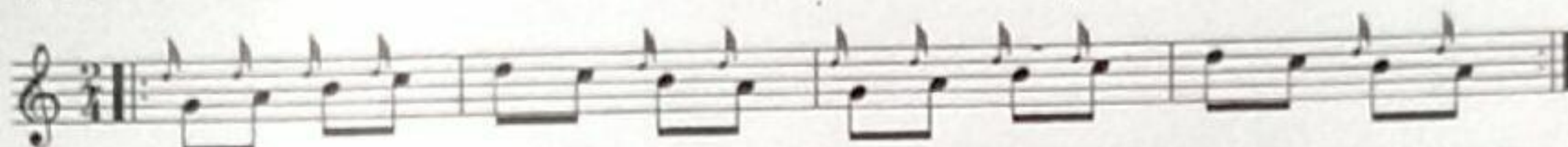
Up and down

In pipe music, you'll often encounter 'up' and 'down' D gracenotes side-by-side, so here are some appropriate exercises.

The first is awkward, but a great strength-builder for the D gracenote. Repeat it until your D finger gets tired or you get hungry.

31

52-84 / 104-168



Finally, here are two versions of an exercise in jig time — a time signature that demands great control in playing D gracenotes.

The first note in each three-note grouping — a beat note — is written as a sixteenth note, but in jig playing the cutting of this note is fairly relaxed. In fact, many modern jig players don't cut this note at all and play this three-note group quite round. Whatever style you prefer, it is critical to hit this note and its G gracenote on the beat. Also, be sure to give the quarter notes at the beginning of the bars their full due. The recording will help here.

32

63-128 / (x3) 189-xxx



There is only one gracenote difference between #32 and #33 but the positioning of the D gracenote at the bar ends is demanding.

33

63-128 / (x3) 189-xxx



G-D-E combinations

G-D-Es are everywhere. The G-D-E gracenote combination is by far the most common in Highland piping. It can be used to articulate a melody, as in a jig or reel, or it can be disguised as a taorluath. Whatever its form, the G-D-E must be automatic if you hope to have full freedom of musical expression. Once you can play single gracenotes

accurately and on the beat, spend lots of time on these rhythmic beauties. In addition to being relevant to pipe tunes, they are strength builders.

Here are some things to strive for over time as you play the next group of G-D-E exercises:

- Don't run the gracenotes together; separate them and play them clearly, crisply and distinctly.
- Try to make each gracenote sound the same, differing only in pitch.
- Play the G gracenotes accurately when you change notes.
- Play the exercises rhythmically, with the G gracenotes on the beat.

The first G-D-E exercise is written in the form of a jig. This doesn't mean it has to be played at jig tempo, though this is something you may eventually wish to achieve. Though in a jig we might gently *pulse* (lengthen very slightly) the first note in each group of three, here we will play the G-D-Es evenly. The exercise is in 6/8 time: there are two beats in a bar and by now you should know where these beats fall.

34

44-128 / (x3) 132-xxx

The image shows a musical exercise on two staves. The top staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some beamed sixteenth notes. The bottom staff continues the melody. The exercise is labeled with the number 34 and a tempo/rhythm indication of 44-128 / (x3) 132-xxx.

The repeating G-D-Es may confuse your fingers a bit, but be patient and you'll adapt; eventually they'll be as natural as blowing your practice chanter.

Here is the same exercise written with standard G-D-E pointing. Jigs used to be played like this, but today this pointing applies mostly to 6/8 marches. In the exercise, hold the dotted note, but don't crush the D and E gracenotes together.

35

44-96 / (x3) 132-xxx

etc., from #34

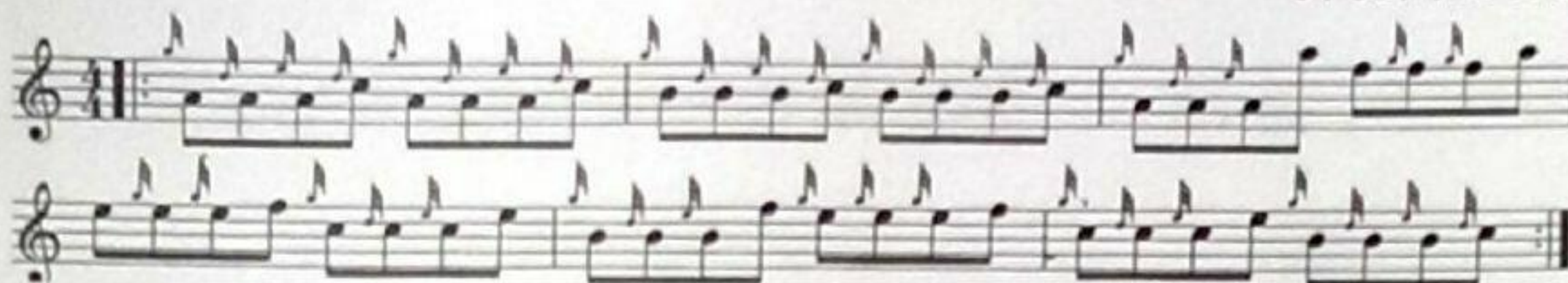
Four-note groupings and reel time

Now we can move on to G-D-Es in four-note patterns common to reels and some marches. #36 is an exercise written by the legendary P/M Willie Ross of Edinburgh Castle, one of the greatest and most influential pipers of the 20th century. The melody is that of the piobaireachd "Too Long in This Condition", said to be one of P/M Ross's favourite tunes.

The exercise is written in 4/4 time, which means there are four beats in every bar. These beats are on the first and third notes in each group of four. Play the pattern slowly and evenly, with great separation and clarity in the gracenoting.

36

54-88 / 108-176



The following exercises in reel time are good not only for reel playing, but for developing better control in all G-D-Es.

These could have been written in 4/4 time too, but reels are generally written in 'cut' time. This means the timing is written as in 4/4, but we 'cut' the number of beats in each bar by half. So it reads like 4/4 but is counted like 2/4 — two beats in a bar.

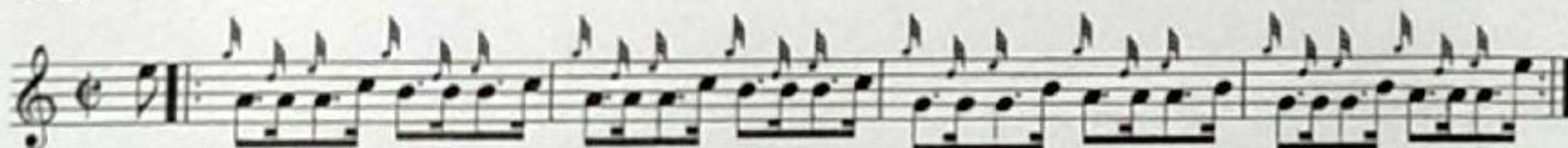
Because these are in cut time, we'll be concerned again with the offbeat. The offbeat is very important in playing reels. It is what gives reels their characteristic 'bounce'.

In the next four exercises, the *beat* is on the *first* note of each group of four; the *offbeat* is on the *third*, which is always an E gracenote. As discussed earlier, if you choose the double-time tempo, your metronome will click out both the beats and offbeats for you. Singing or playing the exercise to a double-timed metronome is a great way to get the rhythmic feel of reel playing.

Exercise #38 differs from #37 only by the addition of a D gracenote at the end of each four-note group. Play both according to the guidelines provided at the beginning of this section. Your greatest focus should be on gracenote accuracy, consistency and clarity, then on pointing and rhythm. Don't let the D and E gracenotes run into each other. Keep them distinct.

37

42-88 / 84-176



38

42-88 / 84-176



Finally, we have a classic reel-time variation of the G-D-E with note changes. Poor execution of this pattern – both musically and technically – is the most common problem in reel playing, and some march playing, by pipers at all levels.

Again, use the previous guidelines for playing G-D-Es, but try as well to:

- Hold the first note in each group of four.
- Keep the D and E gracenotes from falling on top of each other.

The only addition to #40 is a D gracenote at the ends of some note groups.

39

42-88 / 84-176



40

42-88 / 84-176



Chapter 3

Doublings

Doublings are our most common gracenote combination. You would have to search long and hard to find a pipe tune that doesn't have a doubling.

As the name suggests, doublings are made up of two gracenotes. These two gracenotes are separated by what is written as a third gracenote but is really just a brief sounding of the melody note between the two main gracenotes.

Once you turn your attention to doublings, you find that your time working on gracenotes was well spent — the better your gracenotes, the better your doublings. Accurate, crisp and rhythmic gracenotes make for strong doublings.

The 'pivotal point' and rhythmic accuracy

Earlier we discussed the 'pivotal point' of an embellishment. This is the single gracenote or finger movement on which the success of the embellishment depends. In doublings, the pivotal point is the first gracenote, which is always a G. Failure to execute a clear and precise G gracenote results in a doubling that is unclear, crushed, out of rhythm, or just plain messy.

On the beat

What can happen to the first gracenote? First of all, it might not be played accurately on the note. Return to the 'G gracenote - up' section in the last chapter for clarification. The second and perhaps more frequent fault with the first gracenote is that it is often played *ahead of the beat*. When this happens, the rhythm of the tune becomes skewed and the tune unmusical.

Here is a cardinal rule about doublings: *the first gracenote is always on the beat*. All too often, pipers push the doubling in early and put the last gracenote on the beat. The example below shows the wrong and right placement of the beat in a doubling. The beat is marked with an arrow:



Placing the beat on the wrong gracenote is actually one of the easiest technical errors to make in piping. Some players may discover they have spent years playing some or all of their doublings ahead of the beat. These doubling exercises are designed in part to help fix this very fault. If this is not a problem for you, count on this doubling chapter to make your doublings clearer, crisper and easier to execute. This will allow you to think less about doublings and more about music or blowing in tune.

First gracenote focus

Let's focus first on the pivotal point — the first gracenote. In the first two exercises for each note, you will be asked to play:

- a note change with a single G gracenote, followed by
- the same note change with a doubling.

The beat will always be on the G gracenote whether you are playing just the gracenote or the whole doubling. Execute the G gracenote with the same rhythmic accuracy both by itself and within the doubling. Whether you are an experienced player or not, these initial two exercises for each note of the scale are crucial. Even if you can play them well your piping will improve by repetition of these simple but effective exercises.

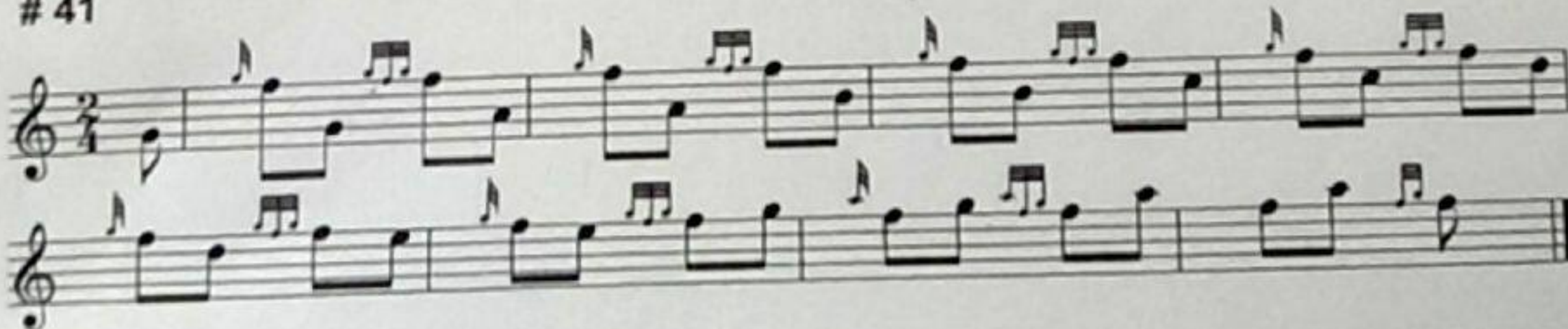
We start with the F doubling, initially skipping high A and high G. In fact, these two are not classic doublings and are more accurately described as 'throws'. They will be addressed near the end of the chapter.

F doubling

The first F doubling exercise is in 2/4 time. The beat is on the first note in each couplet — a G gracenote both times. Make the G gracenote feel and sound the same both with and without the doubling. You may notice a tendency to play the first gracenote in the doubling larger than the second; try to make both gracenotes in the doubling the same size. Listen to the recording to hear how the doubling is articulated. Play the exercise evenly, with every note the same length.

41

42-84 / 84-168



Now we'll give this exercise a different character by holding the beat note and cutting the passing note. Play the dotted note quite long, but don't overcut the short note. Articulate. Keep the initial G gracenote in each doubling on the beat.

42-84 / 84-168



43

42-84 / 84-168



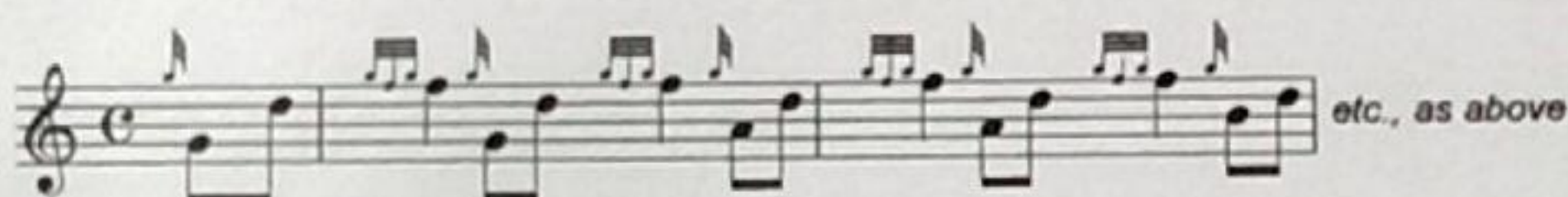
Rhythmic Fingerwork

44

36-80 / 72-160



If you want to try something similar but easier, you could write this exercise in 4/4 time with no pointing. The bar lines would remain in the same places. The eighth notes would become quarters and the combination of the dotted-sixteenth and thirty-second notes would be written as two eighth notes, like this:

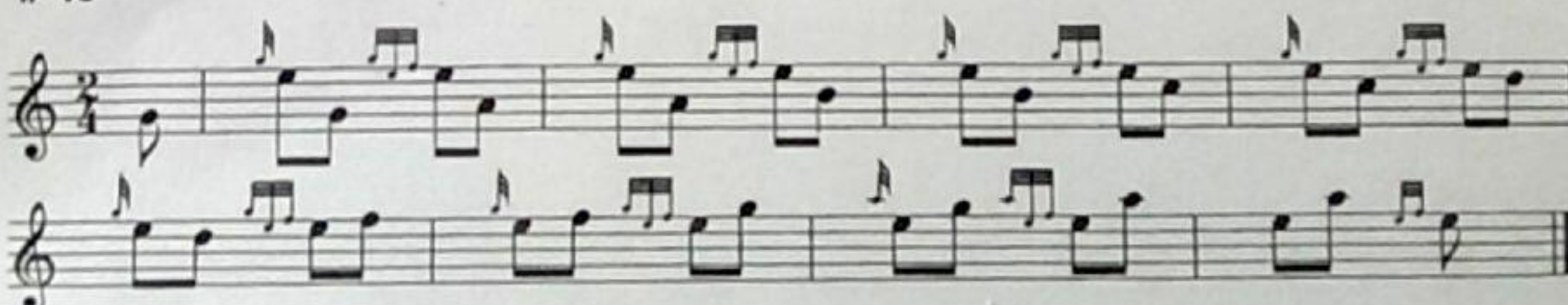


E doubling

This is probably the most common doubling in piping and the one in which the two gracenotes are most likely to become jumbled together. The G gracenote in the movement is still the pivotal point, as is stressed in the first two exercises. Aside from playing the G gracenote on the beat, make sure there is an audible space between the G and F gracenotes.

45

42-84 / 84-168



Here is the pointed version of #45. Point the long notes, but don't over-cut the short ones.

46

42-84 / 84-168



If you feel you are playing the G gracenote well but have trouble with the F gracenote, you can practice playing the F gracenote alone several times on E. Or try to play alternating G and F gracenotes on E, making sure that they are as identical as possible in size and clarity.

The most difficult context in which to play an E doubling is from a short F; this is the focus of #47. Don't over-cut the short F. Be sure when you play the G gracenote either with or without the doubling that the high G and F fingers hit the chanter at the same time and on the beat.

47

42-84 / 84-168



Here's the 2/4-march exercise. An E doubling following any short note is a very common pattern in piping, so it's given ample attention here. Put lots of pointing into the dot-cut combination. It may be helpful to set the metronome to double time and sing the exercise.

48

36-84 / 72-168



As we did in the F-doubling section, we can also play #48 round and in 4/4 time. See the example after #44 and apply it here if you find this 2/4 version overly demanding.

D doubling

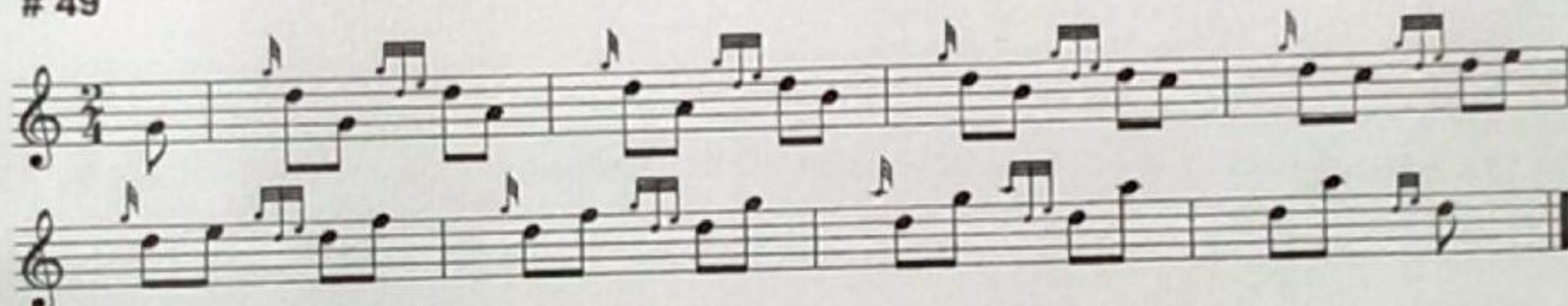
You should by now be familiar with the pattern these doubling exercises follow and the method they stress:

- Focus first on the G gracenote.
- Play the G gracenote on the beat and on the note.
- Make sure the G gracenote feels and sounds the same whether it's played alone or in the doubling.
- Keep a clear separation between the first and second gracenotes.

Here is the first exercise for D doublings. (Don't confuse the D doubling with the D throw, which is covered in the next chapter).

49

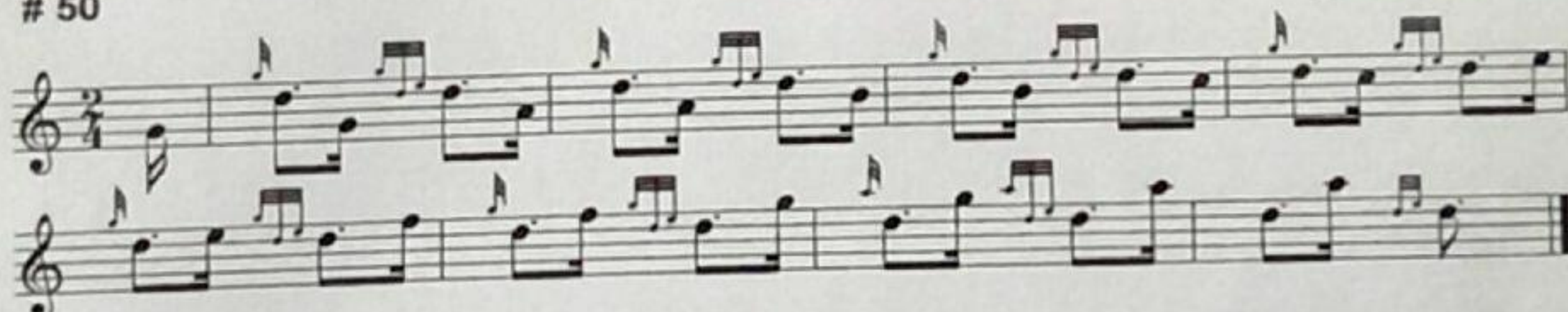
42-84 / 84-168



Now add pointing, but keep the clarity and the rhythm of the movement.

50

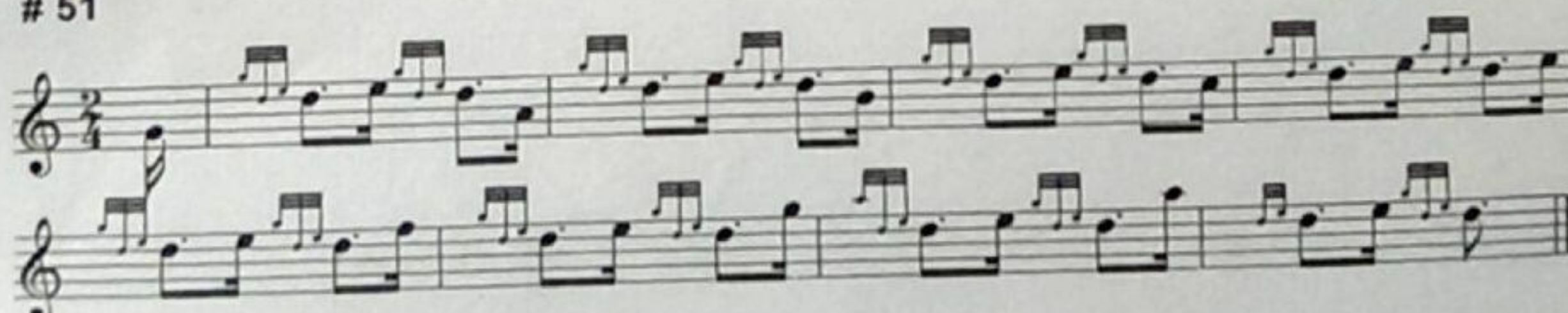
42-84 / 84-168



Playing a D doubling from a short E is for many one of piping's little bug-bears and is always worth a bit more effort. Here's your chance.

51

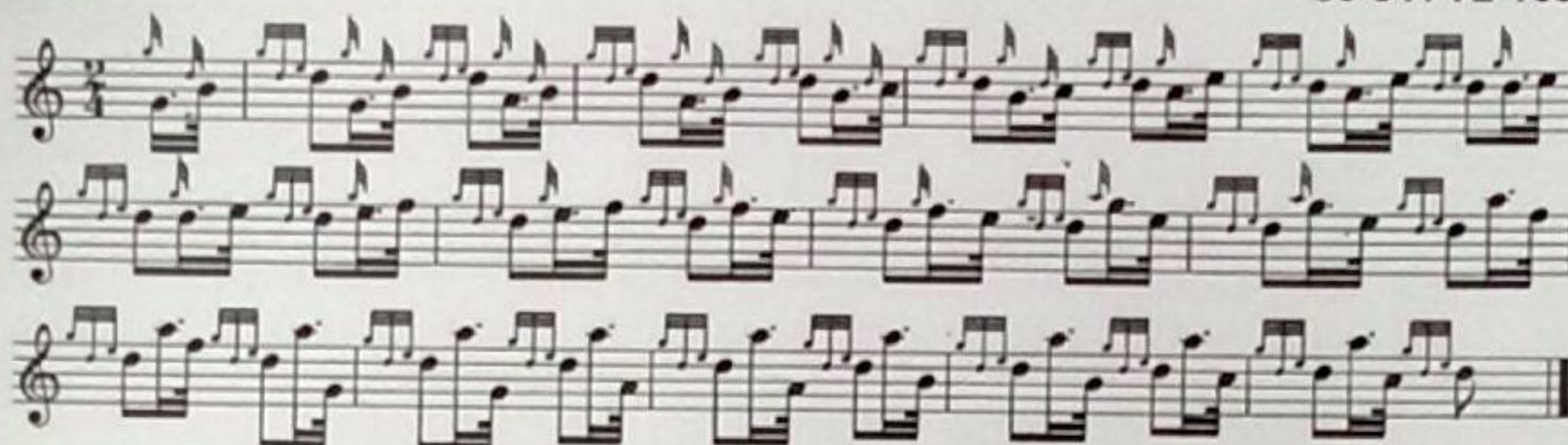
42-84 / 84-168



Once again we come to the 2/4-march exercise. If you're not ready for it, stay with the more basic exercises. If you are — solo competitors at any level should be — listen for the beat and the offbeat. Using the metronome on double time is preferred; singing the exercise first is suggested.

52

36-84 / 72-168



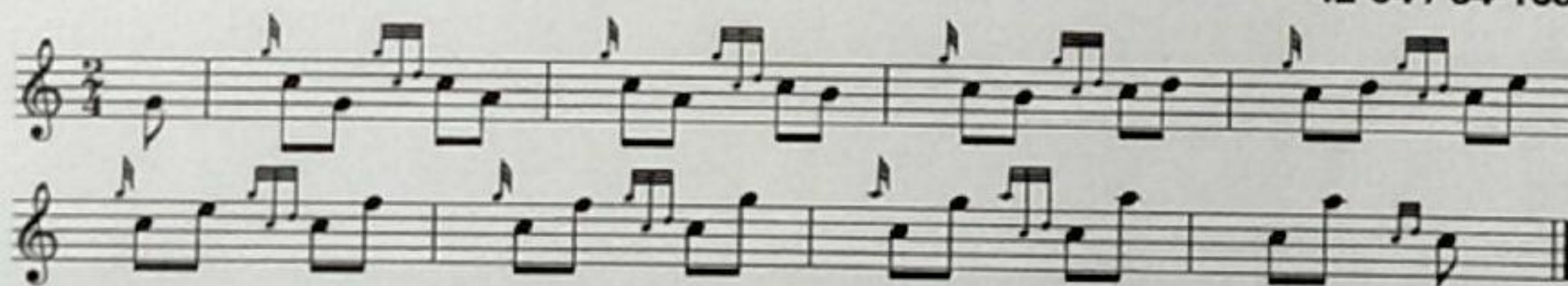
If #52 gives you trouble, adapt it to 4/4 time as we did in the example after #44.

C doubling

C doublings are everywhere — almost as common as E doublings. They're a little different from doublings on F, E and D in that the two gracenotes are made on different hands. Perhaps for this reason it is easy to put the gracenotes 'on top' of one another — that is, with no space between them. Keep them separated. Again — the G gracenote is on the beat.

53

42-84 / 84-168



Remember in #53 and 54 that the half-doubling on any note is played with the first gracenote (always the melody note) on the beat.

54

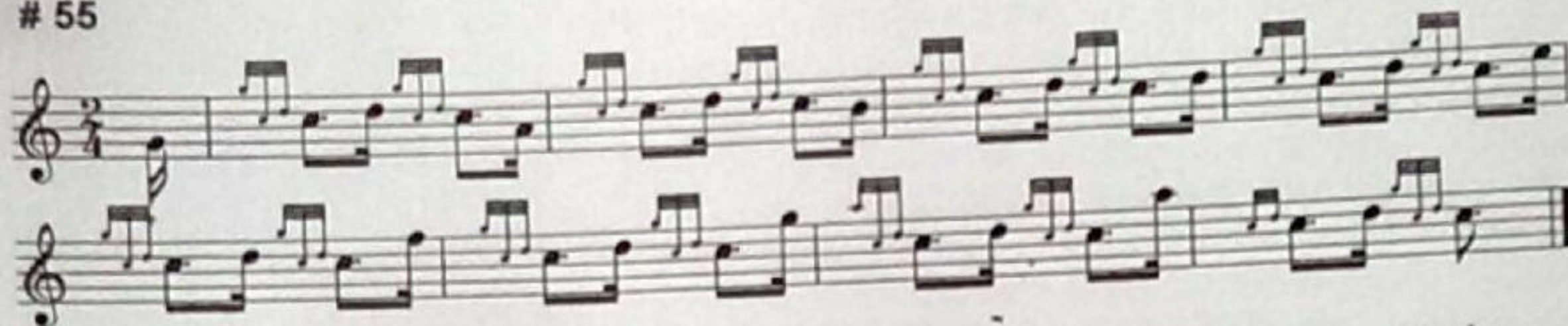
42-84 / 84-168



The next exercise focuses on the C doubling from a short D. Try not to tighten the bottom hand in this one, and don't crush the short notes.

42-84 / 84-168

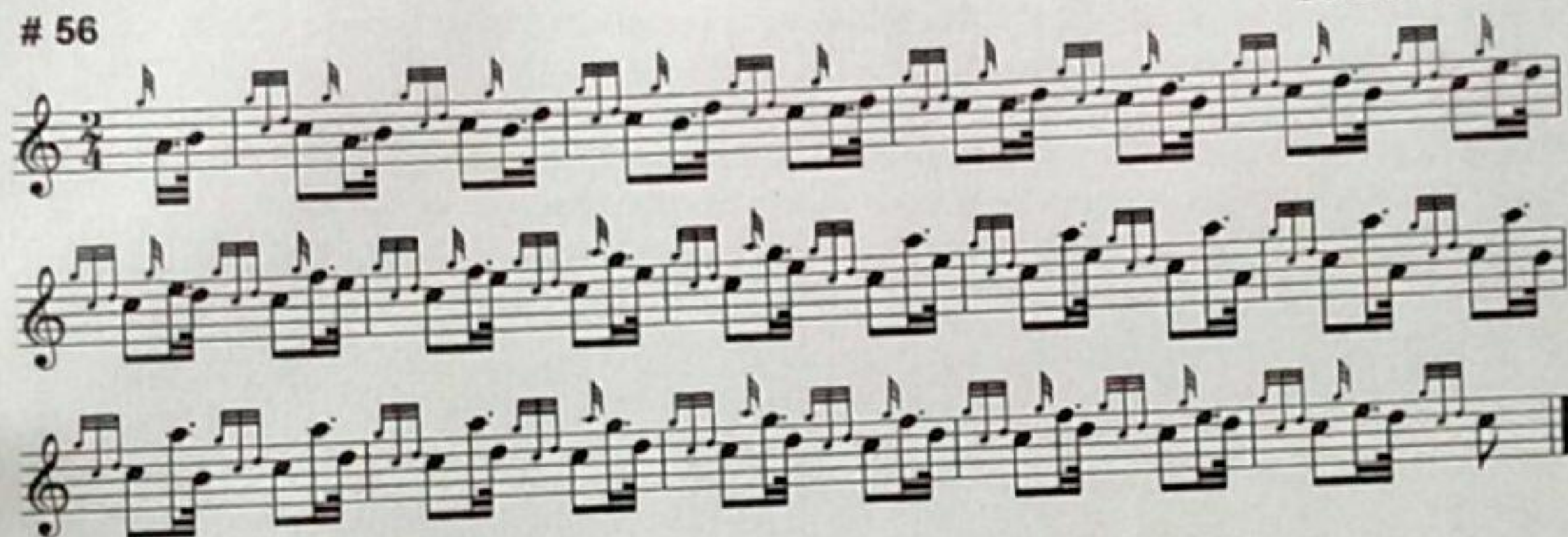
55



Again the 2/4-march exercise is our finale. In this and all others like it, play with the same rhythm and expression you would play in a real march. Use the metronome at double time; sing or finger along and feel the rhythm.

36-84 / 72-168

56



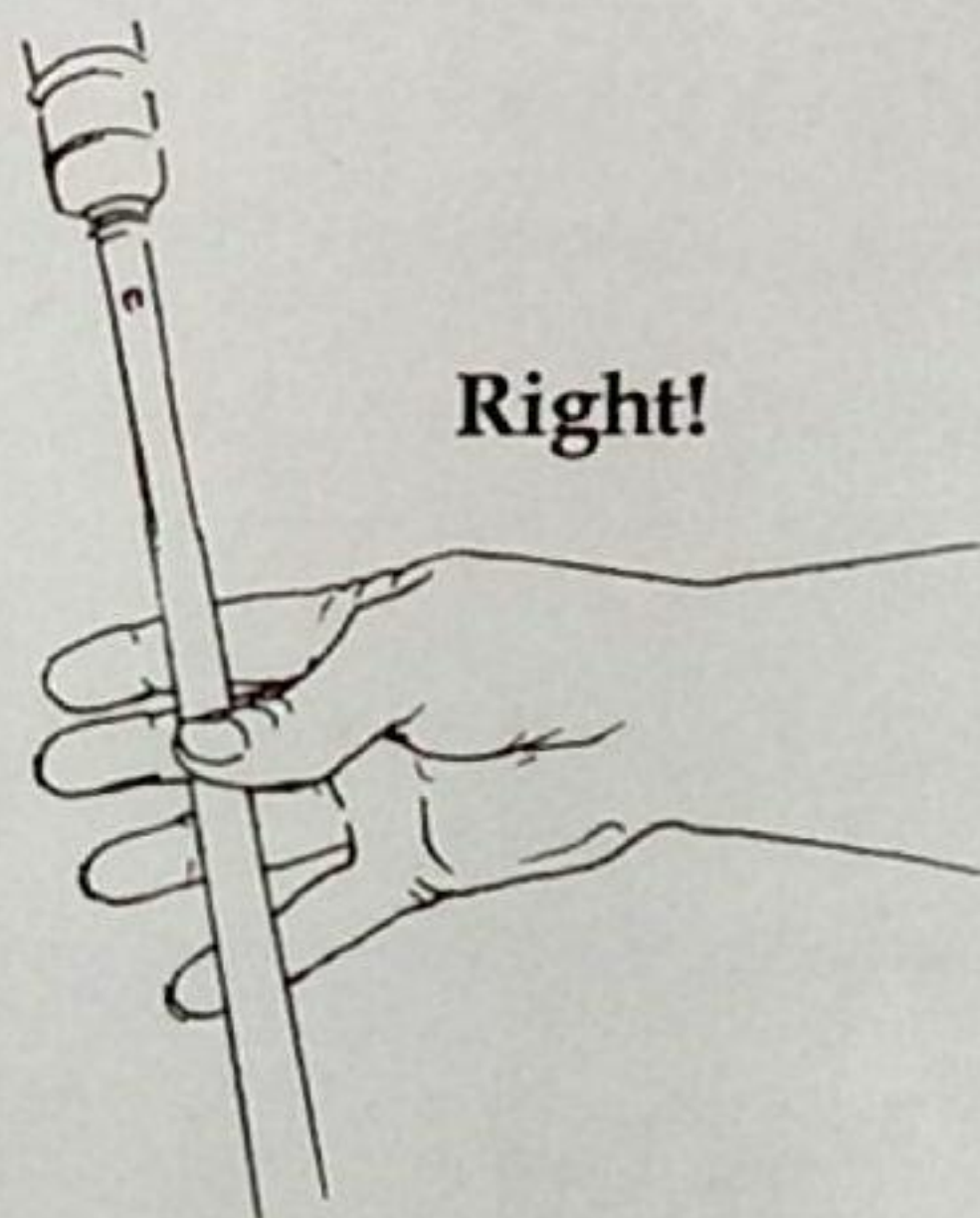
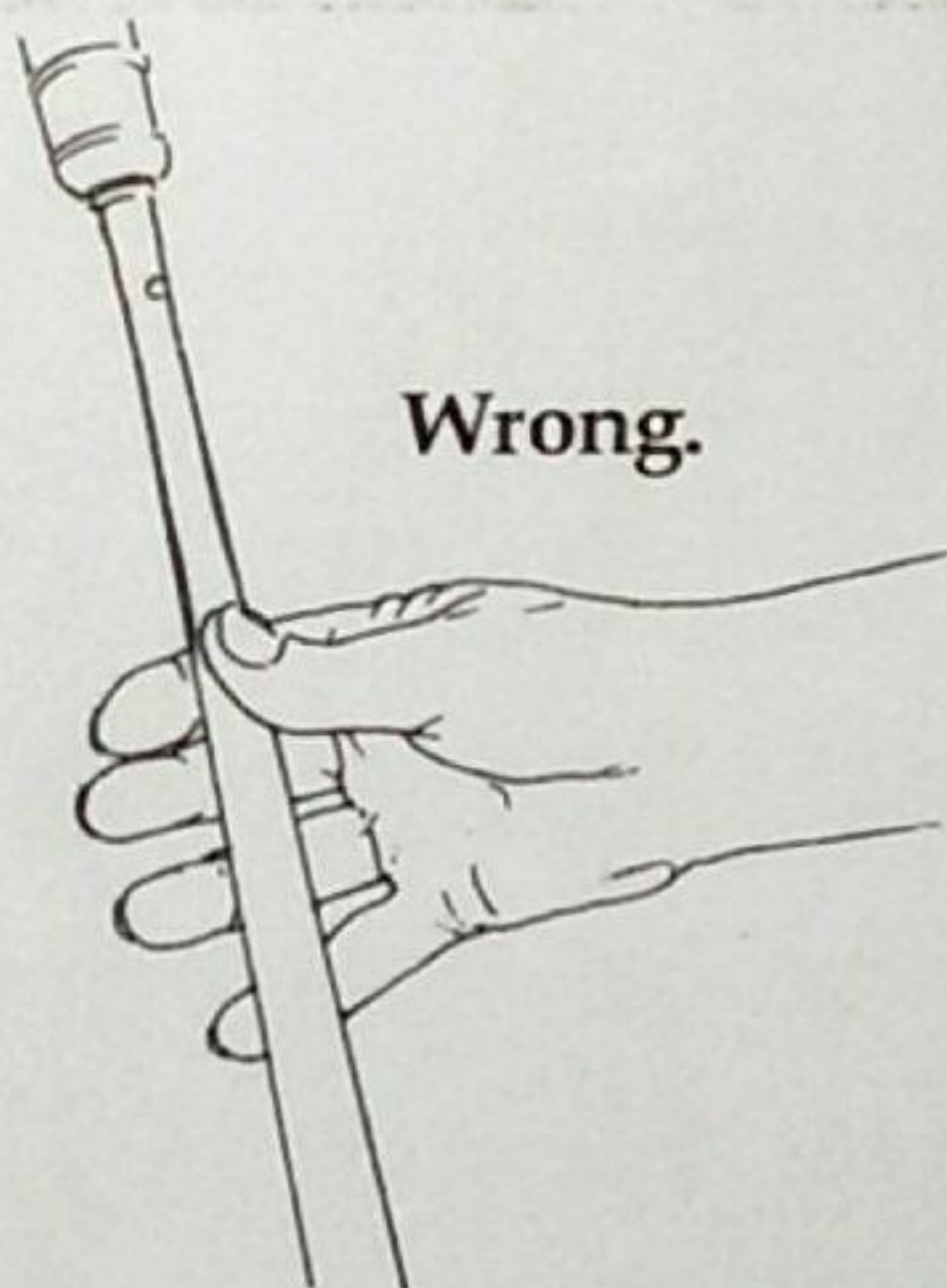
For an easier version, try this in 4/4 time, like the example after #44.

Wherefore art thou, thumb?

Check the position of the thumb on your bottom hand to see that it is not placed too high on the chanter. If you set it more or less across from the D (index) finger it is too high; you will have a tendency to clutch the chanter tightly between those two digits a little like you were squashing a bug. This decreases your bottom hand agility, making C and B doublings tight.

The right thumb should in fact be placed *across from or just slightly below the C finger*, perhaps even half way between the C and B if you're comfortable with that. In this way the thumb acts as a fulcrum, allowing your bottom hand to pivot freely. If you've never placed your thumb here before it will feel very awkward, maybe even painful, but it's well worth getting used to.

The best way to re-locate that thumb is to roll up a couple of inches of tape into a tiny cylinder (sticky side out) and stick it with another piece of tape onto the back of the chanter. Place your thumb on the chanter where you want it, then stick the cylinder onto the chanter directly above your thumb so the thumb can't slide any higher. The cylinder prevents your thumb from reverting back to its old, preferred position. It may be uncomfortable for a day or two, but leave it there as long as you need it until the new position feels natural.



B doubling

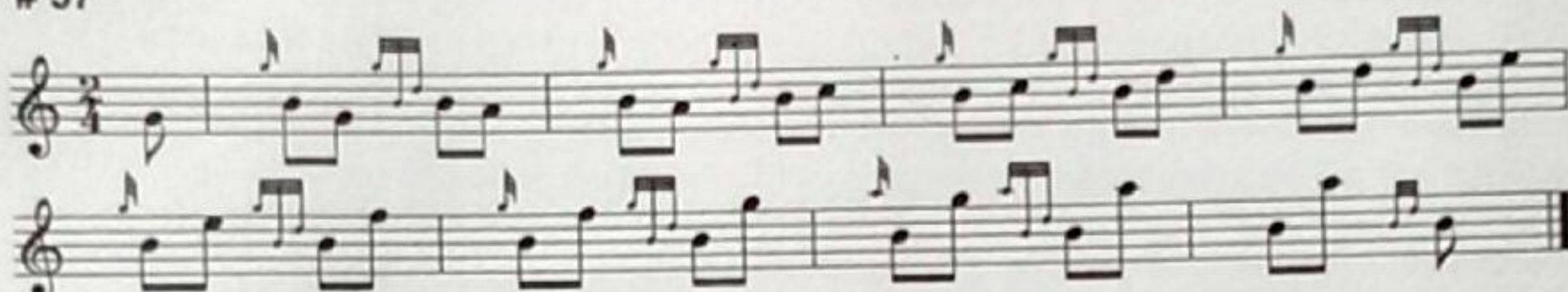
For most people, this is the easiest doubling. It is very similar to the C doubling and everything said about the C doubling applies.

As with all previous doublings, you may play a simplified version of #60 in 4/4 time as shown in the example after #44.

At the end of this chapter we'll put C and B doublings into strathspey time and give your fingers a real workout.

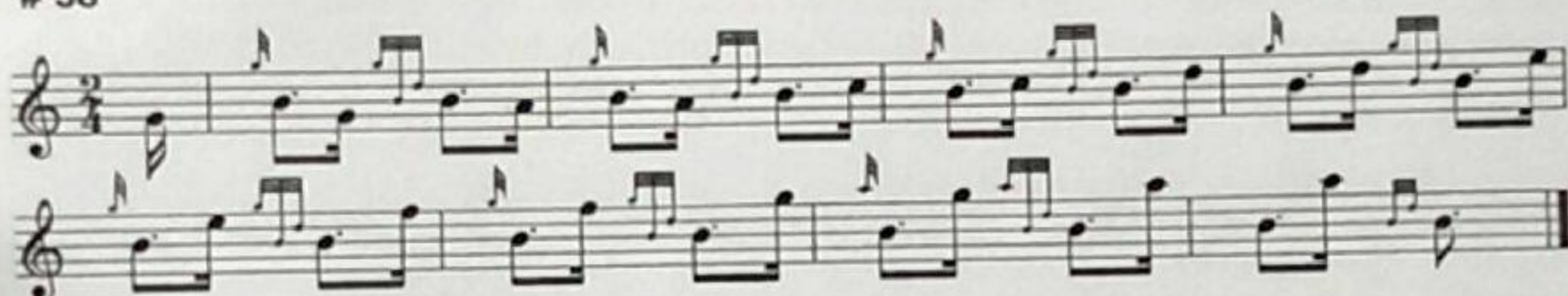
57

42-84 / 84-168



58

42-84 / 84-168



59

42-84 / 84-168



60

36-84 / 72-168



High A doubling

The high A and G doublings have been left until this point because they are unlike the rest of the doublings. They might more properly be called 'throws', along the lines of the D throw we'll see in the next chapter. Unlike true doublings, which sound as a result of gracenote fingers *hitting* the chanter, throws result from fingers striking and then being *lifted* or 'thrown' from it.

In its simplest, most limited description, the high A doubling is simply two high A's separated by a thumb strike, or hit. There are two ways to strike the high A hole:

- 1) Hit it straight on with the thumb.
- 2) Sweep the thumb across the high A hole in a downward or upward motion.

Either of these ways is acceptable, though the sweep is more common. In fact, the sweep is a must if you hope to play the high A 'trill' that is becoming common in jigs, reels and hornpipes. It is executed by sweeping the high A finger across the hole very quickly several times in both directions — a sort of birl on high A.

The rhythm and the action of 'throwing' the high A can be described in two ways. For demonstration purposes, we might write it out as follows. The beat is on the first high A:



If you actually play it the way it is written here, the high A before the strike may be too long. An overly large high A before the hit is a common error among novice pipers. It might be more accurate to describe the movement in the following way. Starting from low A:

- Play a **high A gracenote** up to a *false high G* (i.e. with the E finger left on the chanter); the beat is on the high A gracenote.
- Immediately after you've played the gracenote, lift the **high A** finger to complete the movement.

This might be written as follows:



* indicates a 'false' high G

This example is designed to give you the 'throw' feeling of a good high A doubling. The asterisk over the high G indicates that this short note is played with the E finger on the chanter. Now on to some exercises.

Here is a simple high A doubling scale, with two doublings on each note of the scale. Put the beat on the first high A in the movement — that is, when the high A 'gracenote' finger strikes the chanter.

61 36-84 / 72-168

Now add pointing.

62 36-84 / 72-168

Let's end with a 2/4 tune simulation. The dotted note is on the offbeat. If you're using the metronome, use the double-time reading; sing the exercise first, and tap your foot.

63 36-84 / 72-168

See the example after #44 if you would like to create an easier version of this exercise in 4/4 time.

High G doubling

The high G doubling has even more of a 'throw' feeling to it than the high A doubling. When executed well, the G index finger playing a high G doubling performs the same motion as the D index finger playing a D throw (see next chapter).

Again, as with the high A, we might write it out as two high G's separated by a strike or hit to F:



Again, this works well as an illustration, but does not capture the flavour of the movement.

Instead, starting from low A:

- Play a **high G** gracenote up to a short F.
- Immediately after you've played the **high G** gracenote, lift the **high G** finger to complete the movement.

This might be written as follows:

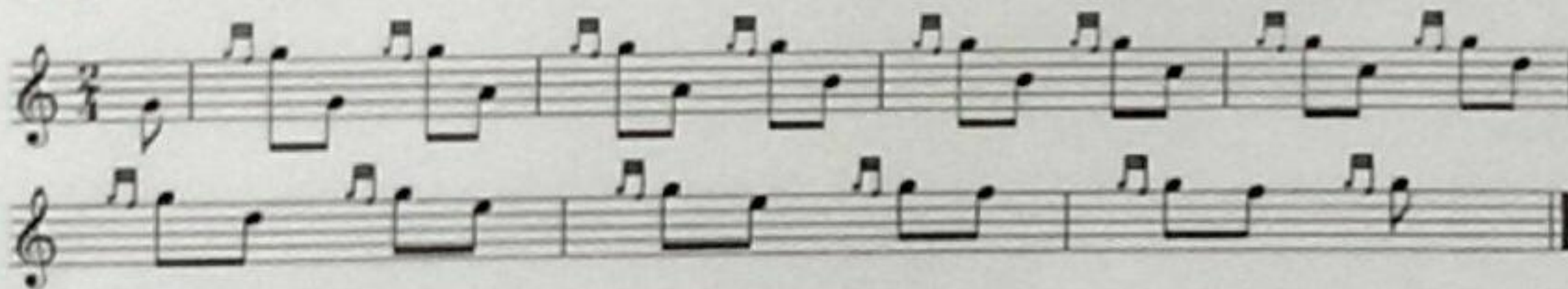


The beat, of course, comes on the G gracenote — when the high G gracenote finger hits the chanter.

Here are the two scale exercises, one without pointing, one with.

64

36-84 / 72-168



Now try the 2/4-march exercise. Point it, but don't crush the short note. The high G gracenote is on the beat, the dotted thirty-second note is on the offbeat; use the double-time metronome reading and sing first to get a sense of the rhythm. If the numerous high A gracenotes give you a problem, you may leave them out, except for the last two, which are essential to the melody.

66

36-84 / 72-168

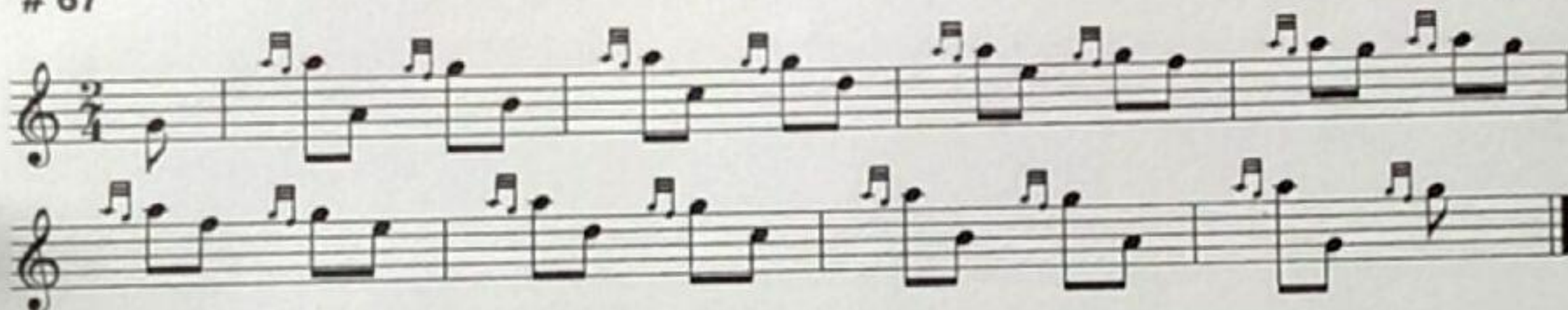


See the example after #44 for the simpler 4/4 version of this.

Finally, here is an odd but effective scale exercise with alternating high A and high G doublings. Keep your rhythm steady, and keep the beat in the right place.

67

36-84 / 72-168



You may wish to try a pointed version of this, as in #65, above.

The G-D-E combination – C and B doublings in strathspey time

We'll end the doubling section with some practical work, particularly on the bottom hand.

The doubling movements on C and B are the heart of strathspey playing. However, though we think of these as *doublings*, it might be more accurate to describe them as G-D-E triplets. Having said that, many of what we call 'triplets' in piping are not really triplets at all, because more often than not we rest on the last note. So let's just call these doubling/triplet things G-D-E combinations in strathspey time. The three examples below show the different ways this embellishment might be written in modern notation. All are considered to be equivalent in 2/4 time:



Of these three examples, the third is the most accurate. It is a classic illustration of how a technical movement can become very much a part of the rhythm and melody of a tune. These movements require all the doubling skills discussed in the last few pages. These skills, of course, include:

- putting the G gracenote squarely on the note and on the beat
- separating the G and D gracenotes clearly and evenly
- making all the gracenotes the same size.

But they also require great facility with the G-D-E combination covered in Chapter 2.

The first exercise is as straightforward as possible – G-D-E combinations on C and B. The tempo range is very large; the upper tempo is for the real pros, so play as slowly as you wish. Put the beat on the first G gracenote in each movement, *not on the low A melody note*. This is very important; the recording will clarify. Though the movements are written as doublings, think of them as the third example above.

68

44-128

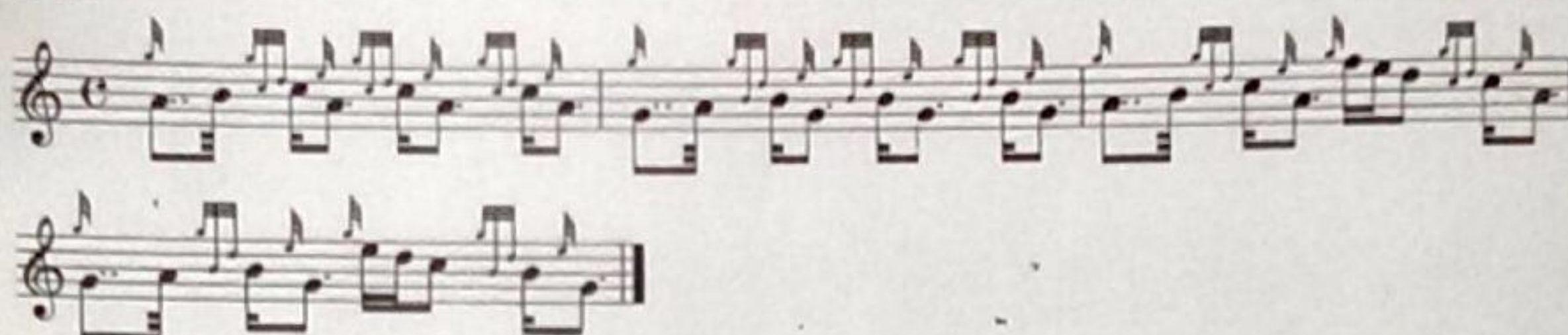


The next exercise uses the same principles but is even more like a strathspey. In most pipe music you will find that the three-note runs in bars 3 and 4 are written as triplets, even though they are almost always played with the third note long as shown below. These little runs should be expressed just like the G-D-E combinations. Also, true to the

unique strathspey idiom, the first note in each bar should be held as long as possible. For clarification, I have used an unorthodox double-dot/double-cut pattern to better represent the amount of pointing required.

69

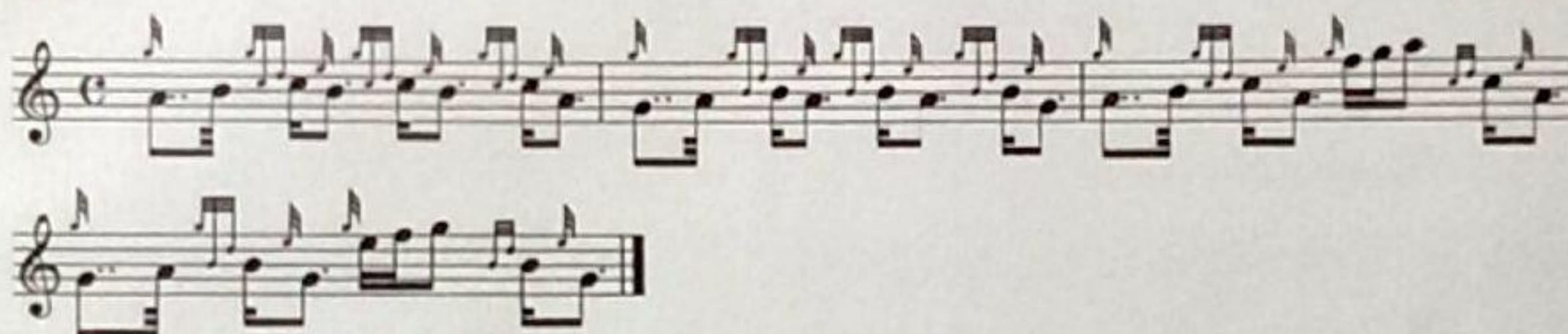
44-128



Exercise #70 is similar, but with some different notes and some half-doublings in the last two bars. Don't start the half-doublings early — put the first note in the movement on the beat.

70

44-128



Though #71, below, is the shortest exercise in this section, it is one of the most difficult to play with rhythmic precision. Hold the first note in each bar — the double-dotted one — as long as possible while still articulating the sixteenth note — the double-cut one — on low A or G; then hit the doubling accurately. It is one of the most demanding patterns in piping, and the downfall of much strathspey playing. Again, the recording should help. Of course, in tunes you won't see the double-cut/double-dot used, but the idea still works.

71

44-128



Here is a similar exercise, but again adding the 3-note run. This exercise also introduces a D throw. You may wish to study the D throw explanations in the next chapter first.

72

44-128



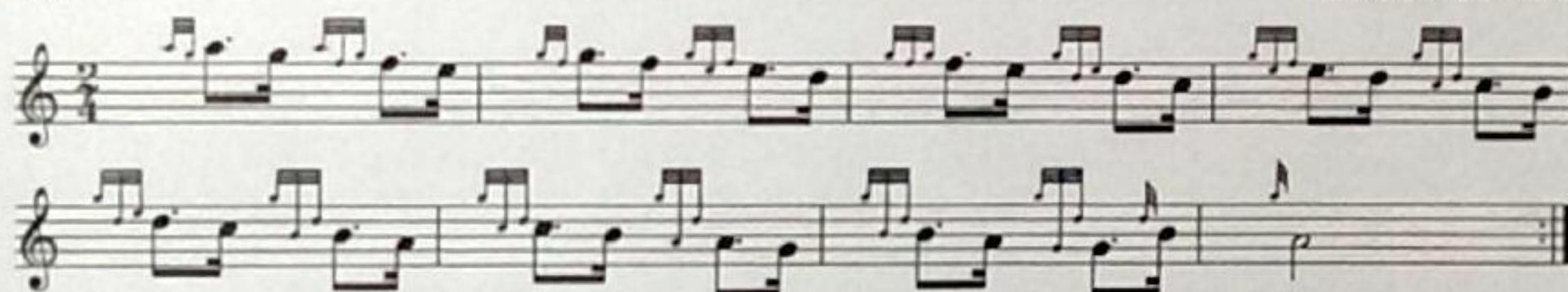
And now for the grand finale: two exercises that put all your doubling skills to use, one in strathspey context, the other in march time. Play these at whatever tempo you are comfortable with. Play all the G gracenotes accurately and in rhythm and put as much pointing as you can into both. The recording will help give you the right feel. The double-dot/double-cut has not been used in #73, but imagine that has been used in beat 1 and 3 of each bar.

73 44-128



And now the 2/4-march simulation.

74 44-80 / 88-160



You could also create a round version of #74 by simply eliminating the dot and cut in each couplet.

Chapter 4

Grips, Taorluaths and More

We come now to a number of movements which differ rhythmically from those we've studied so far. These are bottom-hand embellishments primarily, though they can be made from, and often to, top-hand notes. What distinguishes them from other light music technique is that the beat does not fall on the first gracenote. As we shall see, in the case of grips and taorluaths, it falls on the melody note at the end of the movement. In the D throw and the *darado* (bubbly note), it falls on the D gracenote within the movement. Nor is the pivotal point necessarily at the front of these movements. Although it may change according to the player's fingering needs, the pivotal point usually falls on the beat. As stressed throughout this book, manage the beat well and you're well on the road to mastering these movements.

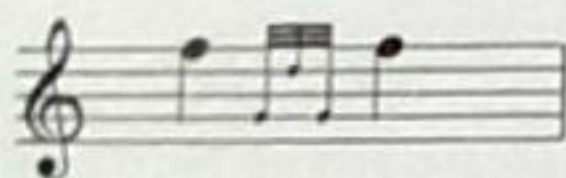
Grips

The grip (or, as the piobaireachd or *ceol mor* players call it, the *leumluath* movement) consists of a D gracenote (in one case it is a B) framed by two low G gracenotes. Ideally, all three gracenotes are the same length. The beat falls on the melody note immediately after the movement. So, if you are playing a grip from low A up to E:



the beat falls on the E; the grip itself is very slightly in front of the beat. The pivotal point — that is, the place where pipers tend to have problems — is the note change from low G to E. Many players have trouble lifting the low G and E fingers off the chanter at the same time in a tune and get an unclean finish to the movement. This problem is compounded when the grip finishes on a top-hand note, where a number of fingers must be lifted from the chanter simultaneously.

For some players, the pivotal point is at the front end of the movement. For example, if you are playing a grip from F and back to F:

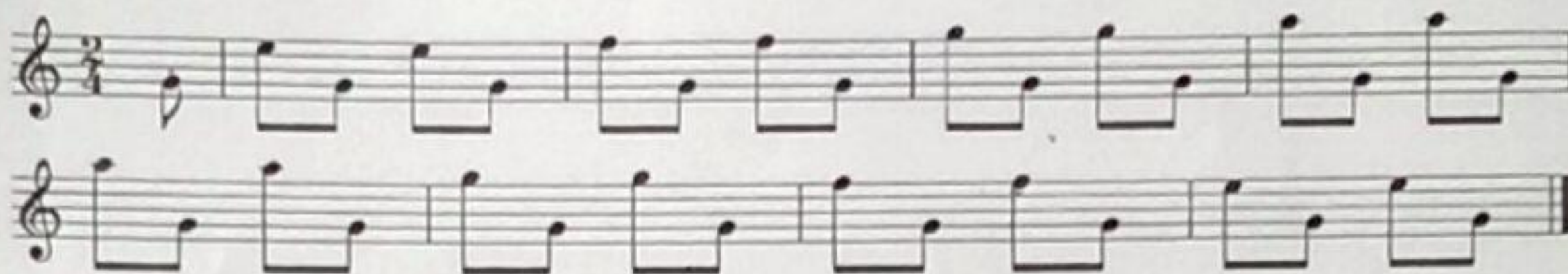


you may find you have a problem hitting the note change from F down to low G accurately — that is, having the F, E and low G fingers hit the chanter at the same time.

The first exercise helps you to practice both of these possible pivotal points at the same time. It contains no grips. A simple note-change exercise, it is a crucial pre-requisite to playing grips well in many contexts. It is in 2/4 time, and the beat is on the first note in each pair. The whole purpose of this exercise is to make sure the right fingers are leaving or hitting the chanter at the same time.

75

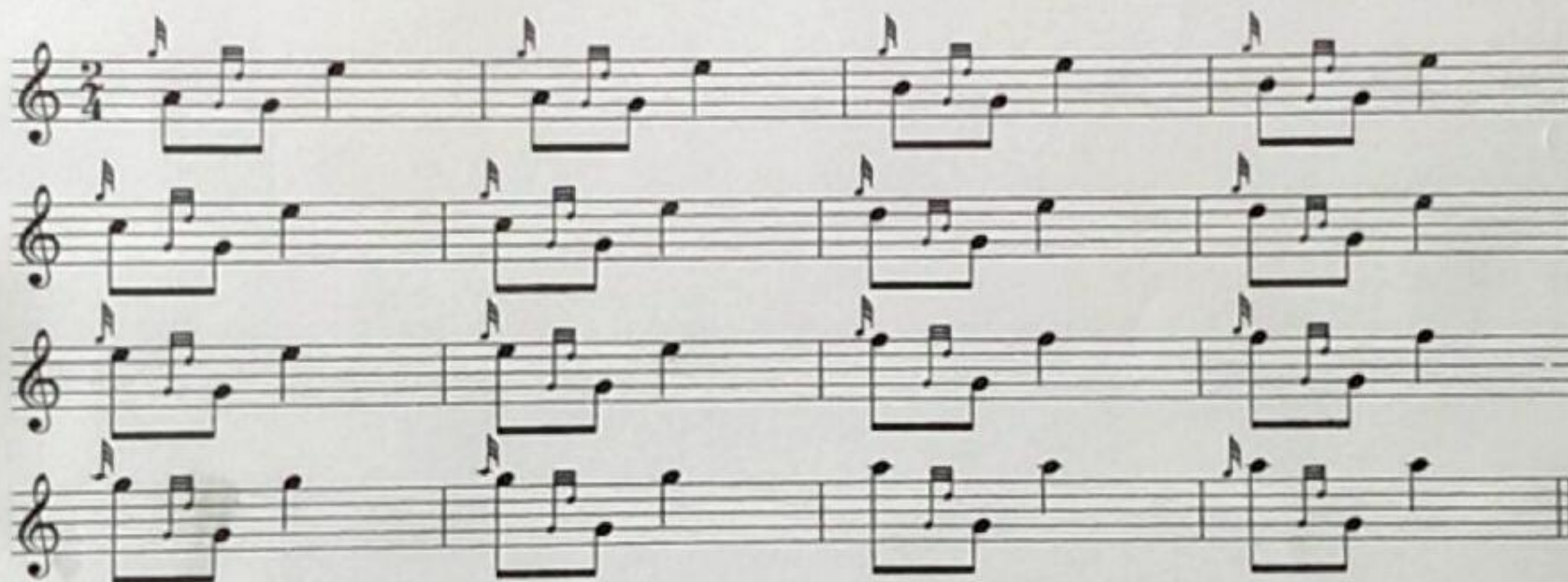
44-84 / 88-168



Now we'll try a breakdown of the grip movement itself. In the next exercise, the grip is played with a pause on the second low G gracenote. It's not written as a grip here, but as a half-doubling to low G. The exercise is in 2/4 time, so there is a beat on the first note in the bar and on the quarter note. Be sure to play each note change from low G cleanly and accurately. And don't let the low G before the D gracenote get too short.

76

48-84 / 96-168

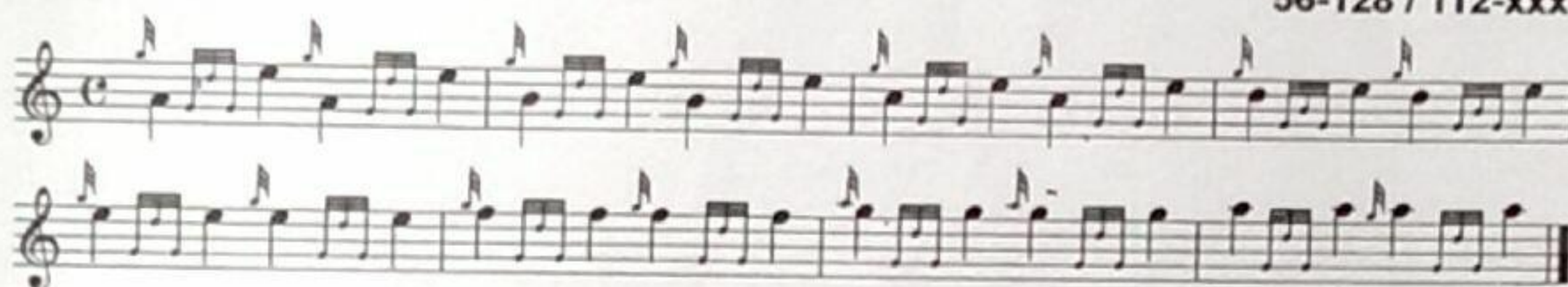


If you didn't already notice it, go back to bars 7 and 8 in the above exercise and look closely at the half-doubling from D. You will see that it shows a *B* gracenote and not a D gracenote. This is one of piping's traditional quirks. Some people might think it's some kind of a MacCrimmon practical joke. It states that when we play a grip (or taorluath) from D, we will play it with a *B* gracenote instead of a D. Much more common in *ceol mor* than in light music, it is awkward and difficult to play, and even the best players rarely get a D grip that is as quick and crisp as the normal movement. Though it might be argued that there are valid tonal reasons for this little piece of dementia, there is really no confirmed explanation for it other than that it is tradition. Be patient and it will improve. Some players tend to write it off immediately and just play the D gracenote, but if you can master it, the effect is quite distinctive. You might even come to like it.

This time, in #77 below, we'll play real grips instead of the half-doubling. All the important points of the last exercise apply, but this time you won't have quite so long to think about the note change after the movement. The exercise is written in 4/4 time, so there is a beat on every quarter note. Keep the low G gracenotes on either side of the D gracenote well articulated.

77

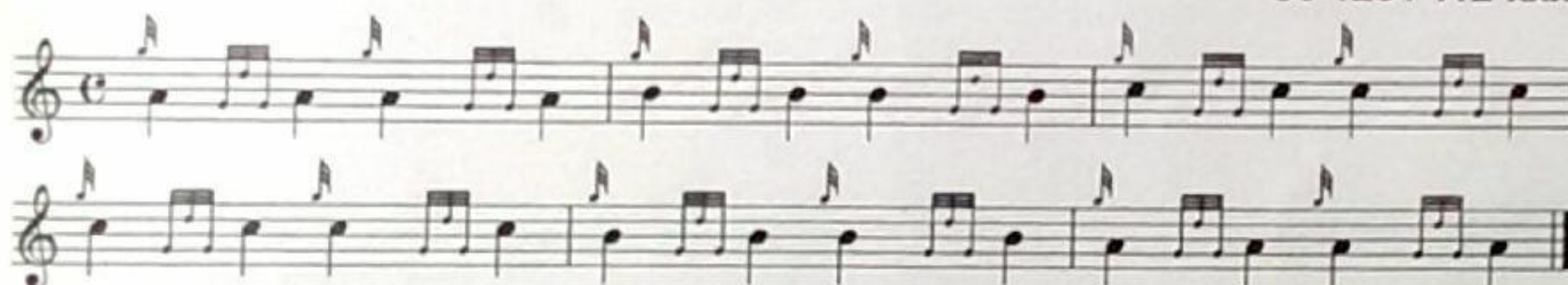
56-128 / 112-xxx



Below, #78 follows the same pattern, but with bottom hand notes only.

78

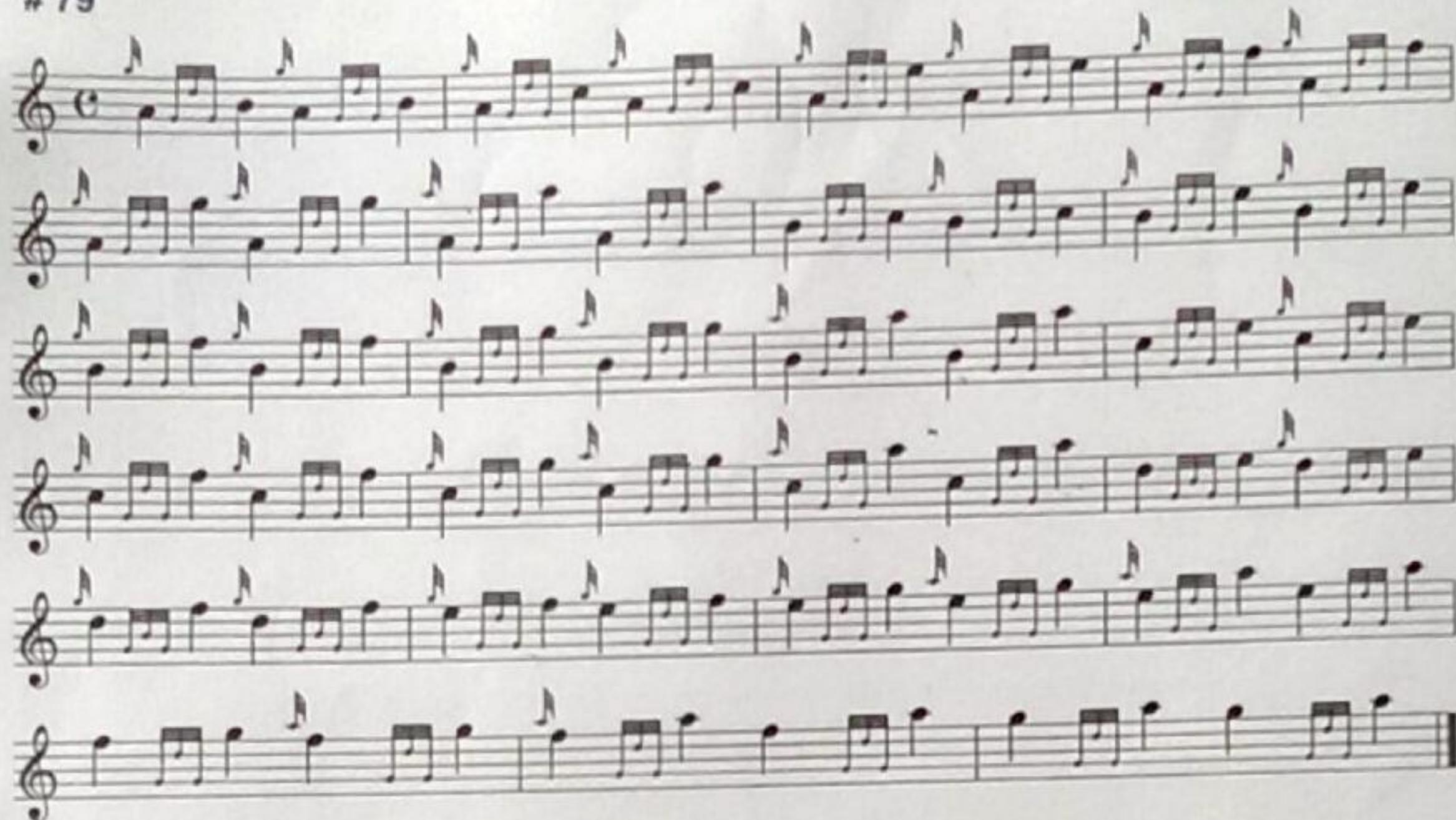
56-128 / 112-xxx



Sticking with the same pattern, #79 below lets you practice most of the note combinations in which grips can be played. The grip is a varied and versatile movement, as evidenced by the number of exercises in this section. Again, the beat is after the movement. Make sure fingers are leaving or hitting the chanter at the same time. Also, take care to play a long, full melody note before the grip.

79

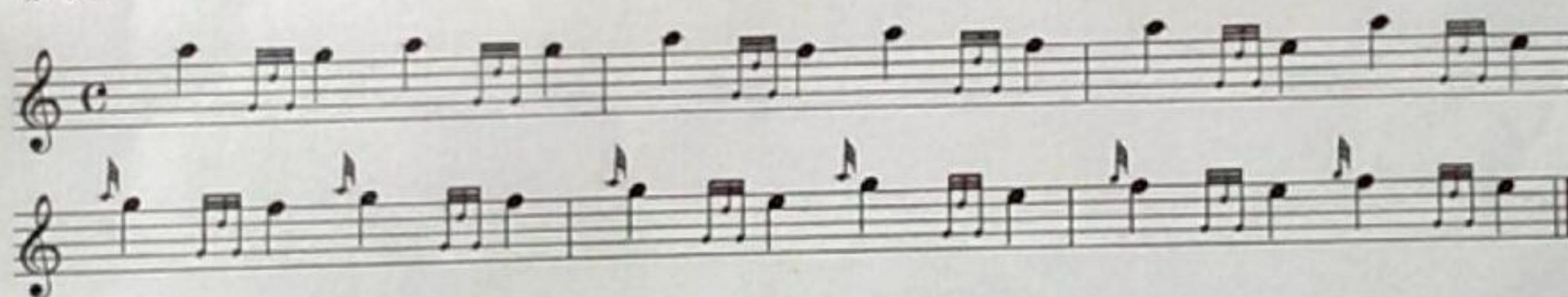
56-128 / 112-xxx



Exercise #80 offers some top-hand combinations that are becoming more common in piping today.

80

56-128 / 112-xxx

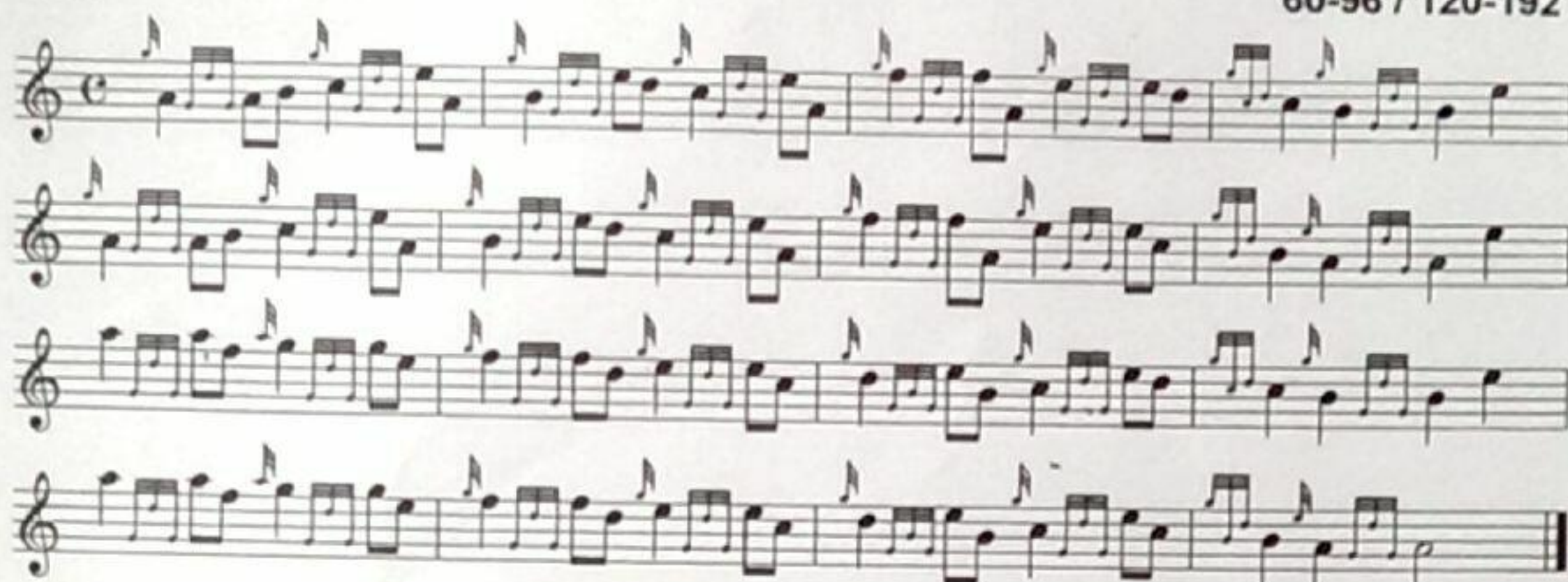


We finish the section on grips with two tune simulations. Both use the same melody, but in different time signatures. One is round, the other pointed. You may wish to sing these before you play them, with or without the metronome.

#81 is in 4/4 time — there is a beat on every quarter note and on the first note of each eighth-note couplet. Play it with a good, strong rhythm. Articulate the low G and D gracenotes, and play long, full melody notes before the grips.

81

60-96 / 120-192



In #82 there are only two beats in the bar, and they fall on the first note in each group of three. So there is *not* a beat on the note after the grip — but there is an offbeat. Listen to the recording and tap your foot double time to hear it. Hold the dotted note after the grip firmly in this one.

82

36-84 / 72-168



Taorluaths

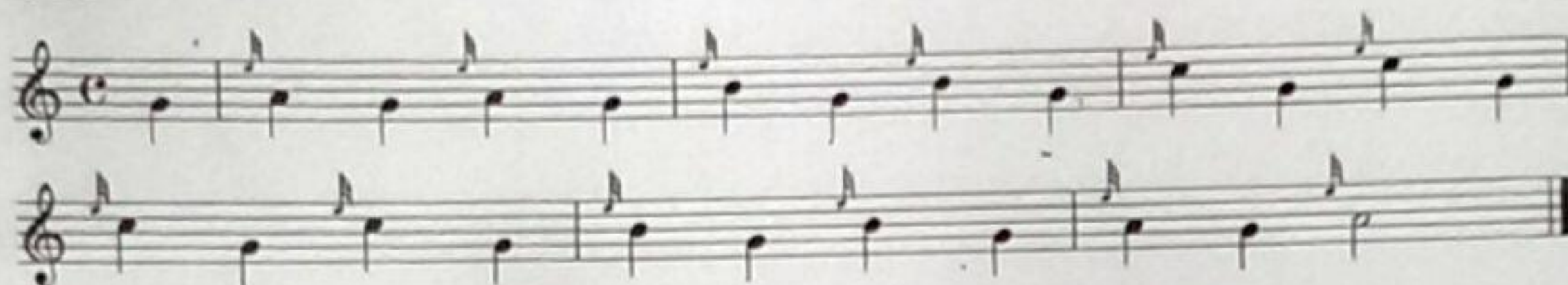
As with grips, the beat in a taorluath falls at the end of the embellishment — on the E gracenote — with the rest of the movement just slightly in front of the beat. Like the grip, the taorluath has two possible pivotal points — one at the beginning and one at the end of the movement. For most players, however, the difficulty in taorluaths is to hit the E gracenote squarely on the note, and on the beat, at the end of the movement. For some pipers, this problem creates such havoc within the taorluath that the whole front

end of the movement gets bent out of shape and the source of the problem goes into hiding.

The first exercise focuses on the E gracenote. Play it squarely on both the note and the beat. The exercise is in 4/4 time; there is a beat on each quarter note.

83

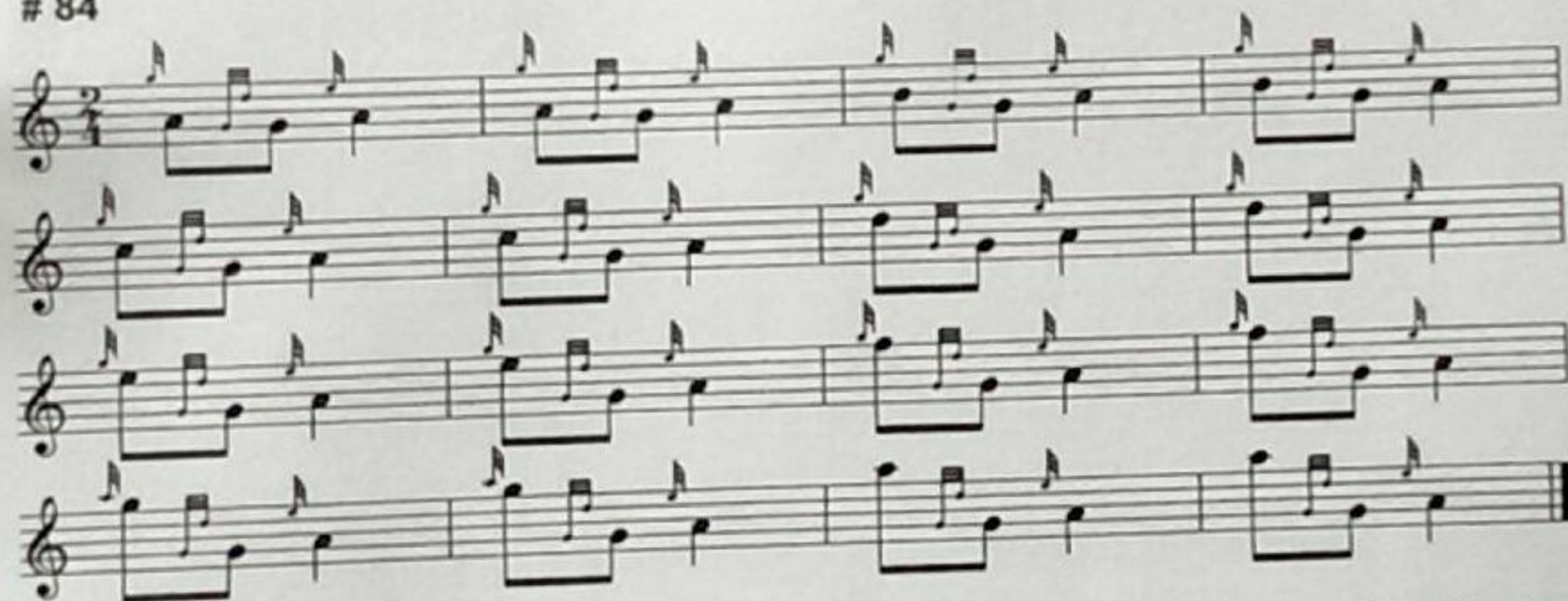
52-84 / 104-168



Now, as with the grips, we'll break the taorluath movement down so there is a pause on the low G before the E gracenote. Perhaps the most important point here, besides a clean and rhythmically accurate E gracenote, is not to let the *first* low G gracenote become too short. Put the low A finger down firmly before you play the D gracenote. This is in 2/4 time; the beat is on the first note in each pair of eighth notes and on the quarter note. Notice that the B gracenote is used in the movement from D, as it was with the grips.

84

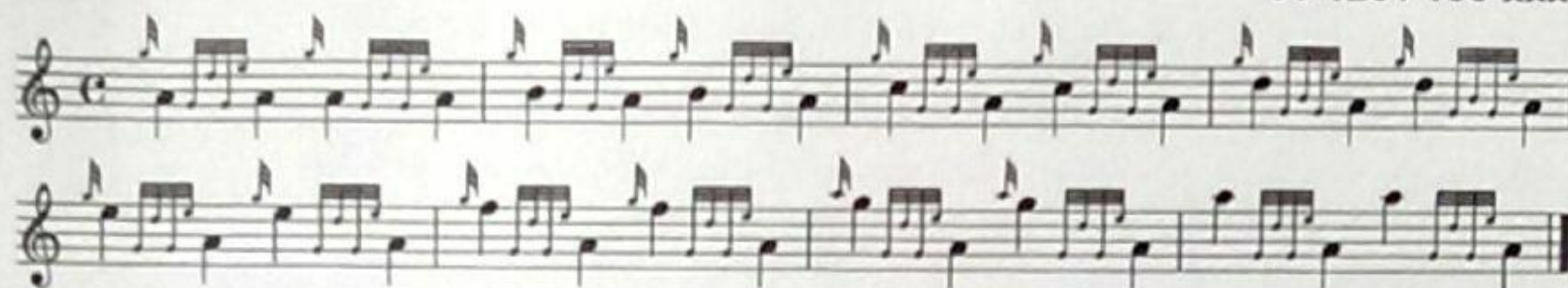
52-84 / 104-168



Now try straight taorluaths up the scale — no pause before the E gracenote. In #85, play the movement as slowly as you must in order to make all the gracenotes clear and even. As with the grip, although the taorluath movement begins slightly ahead of the beat, the melody note before the movement must be held to its full value. Don't get lazy here. Play a nice long note before the taorluath, but be relaxed and open with the movement.

85

50-128 / 100-xxx



The next exercise addresses bottom-hand taorluaths going from and to the same note.

86

50-128 / 100-xxx



We've seen the next two tune simulations in the previous section on grips. The first one is in 4/4 time and plays like a simple march with lots of taorluaths. Keep the beat on the E gracenote after the movement, and articulate the taorluath clearly — don't lose the low G gracenotes.

87

50-128 / 100-xxx



The 2/4-march simulation, below, calls for a powerful rhythmic approach. The beat is on the first note in each group of three. There is an offbeat on the E gracenote at the end of the movement; double-time your metronome and you'll hear it. Give the melody note before the taorluath its full value, and hold the dotted sixteenth note after it as long as you can while staying on the beat. Can you remember all that?



D Throws

Now we come to one of the most controversial pieces of piping fingerwork. Probably more discussion has taken place on whether to play the 'open' or 'closed' D throw than on any other point in piping. People ask, "Which is right?" Well, neither is 'right'. Which style you play is a matter of preference. Traditionally the closed D throw has been much more common in North America than anywhere else, but the open style is also played there. The open movement prevails in *ceol mor* ('pibroch'), though the closed version may be played in this classical music as well. Many top pipers play the lighter, open throw in slower tunes like airs and 3/4 marches, but the heavier, closed movement in the rest of their light music. Some claim to play whichever style they want anywhere they want, but in practice this is difficult to do and quite rare.

Let's describe the two styles briefly and then see how they might be written phonetically.

Open: The open D throw is played pretty much as it is written. It begins with a short but solid low G. What follows next might best be described as a high G throw played using your D finger. In other words, play a **low G** and then:

- Play a **D gracenote** up to C.
- Lift up the D finger quickly after a very short C.

The beat falls on the D gracenote; the low G is very slightly in front of the beat. This style of D throw might be written out in two ways, and here they are:



Played in this way it is a light and airy movement — a classic 'throw'.

Closed: The closed D throw is sometimes called the 'grip' style, because it contains a prominent grip. To play a closed D throw from low A:

- Play a grip from low A to C.
- Lift the D finger quickly after a very short C.

Play one unified movement — don't stop on the C. Again, the beat is on the D gracenote in the grip. In the following example the grip is written phonetically to show the beat on the D gracenote:



Now let's try some exercises. You may have already decided which style throw you want to play, or you may be up for some experimenting. The open throw is written phonetically in #89, and the closed in #90. Play the throws much more open in these exercises than you would in a tune. It is very important in both that the beat be played on the D gracenote.

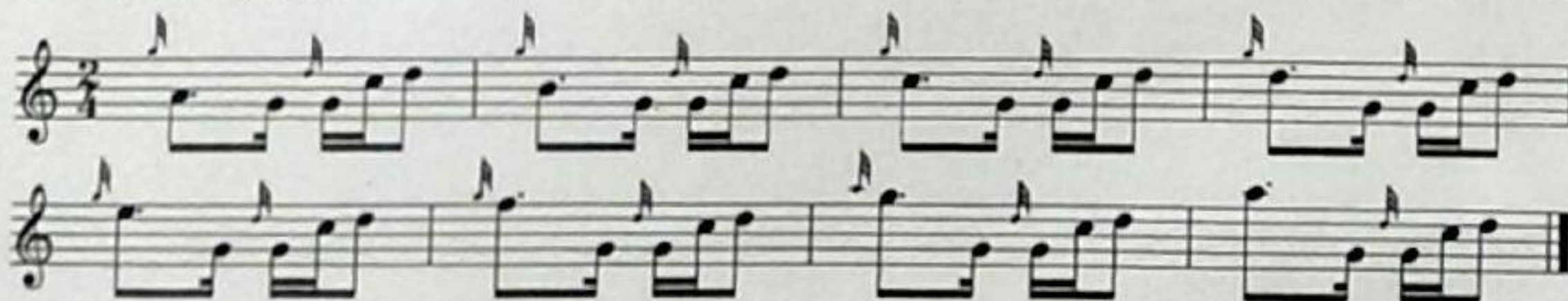
89 (Open throw)

52-84 / 104-168



90 (Closed throw)

42-84 / 84-168



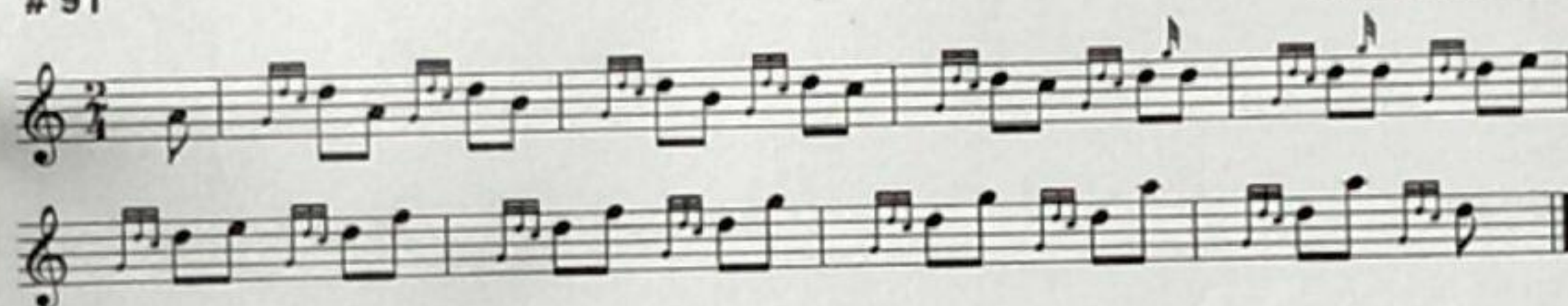
From this point forward, the throw will be written in the traditional manner, though you are free to play the open or the closed style. But first, let's have a more advanced discussion about the freedom you have around beat placement in this embellishment.

Beat placement: Though in the phonetic and slowed versions of the throw you can put the beat very clearly on the D gracenote, when the movement comes up to speed, beat placement becomes a question of splitting hairs. Most top players, if asked to state where they play the beat in a D throw, would likely say it is on the first low G. This is probably fairly accurate, and it gives the throw a driving and powerful feel, as long as the throw is being played very quickly and clearly. Given this possibility, what's the bottom line? In theory, the beat is on the D gracenote. In practice and at full speed, you have the leeway to safely place it just about anywhere in the front end of the D throw. However, do not place it on the D after the movement or your playing will sound very lazy.

Exercise #91 is an extended version of the scale exercises given above. It is written in 2/4 time; the beat falls on the D throw. The pivotal point for the D throw for most people is likely the first low G, particularly when the throw is made from a top-hand note. It can be a challenge to get all the right fingers to hit the low G at the same time. If this is a problem for you, go back to the grip section and make #75 a long-term part of your exercise repertoire.

91

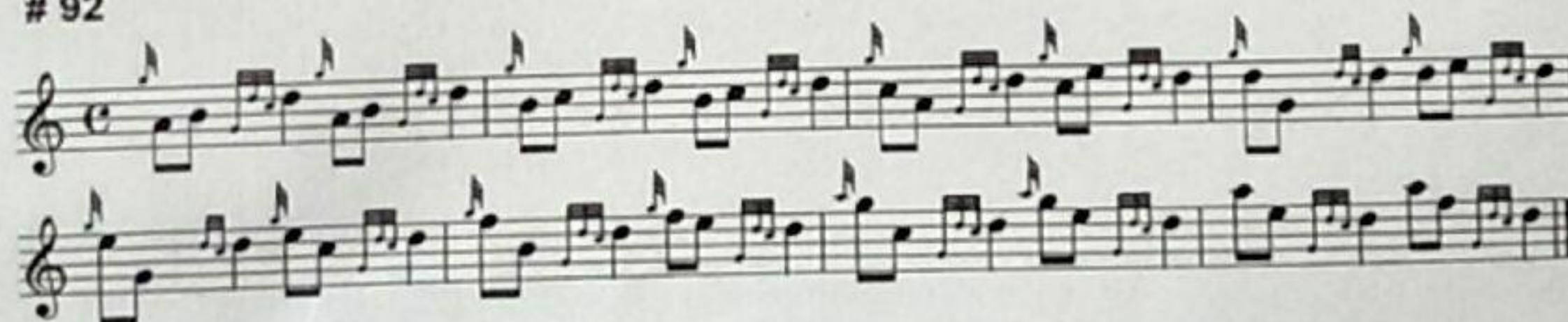
36-84 / 72-168



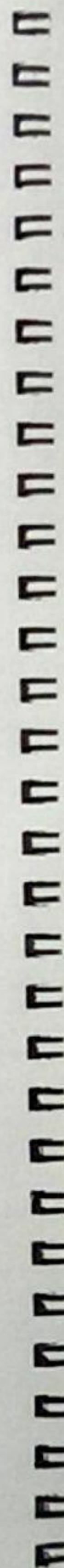
Next we have a 4/4 tune simulation. Play a firm and bold rhythm in this, with the beat on the D throw and on the first note in each pair of eighth notes.

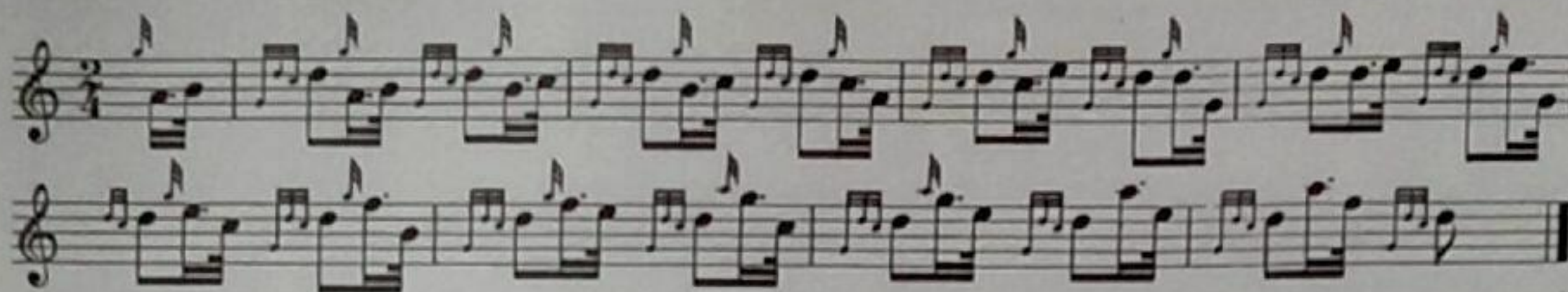
92

52-96 / 104-192



Finally, here is the same tune simulation in 2/4 time. The beat is on the throw throughout. The offbeat is on the dotted sixteenth, which will be quite pointed. Double-time the metronome and try singing the exercise before you play it, to get the exact rhythm.





Darado – the ‘bubble’ note

This unusual embellishment is often called a ‘bubble note’, ‘bubbly note’ or just plain ‘bubbly’. It was originally a *ceol mor* movement – the term ‘*darado*’ is from the ancient canntaireachd vocable system – that has migrated into light music. It is not a very common movement, but chances are you’ll eventually run across it and if you’ve never played it before it will throw you for a loop.

The most common fault in the *darado* is to try to play it too fast. A professional player encountering one in a strathspey would play a sprightly movement. However, for the general-level player, clear, open and rhythmical is the ticket. The cardinal rule for the *darado* is this: if you’re having trouble with it, slow it down and open it up.

Here’s how it works. To play a *darado* from C to B, start on C and play:

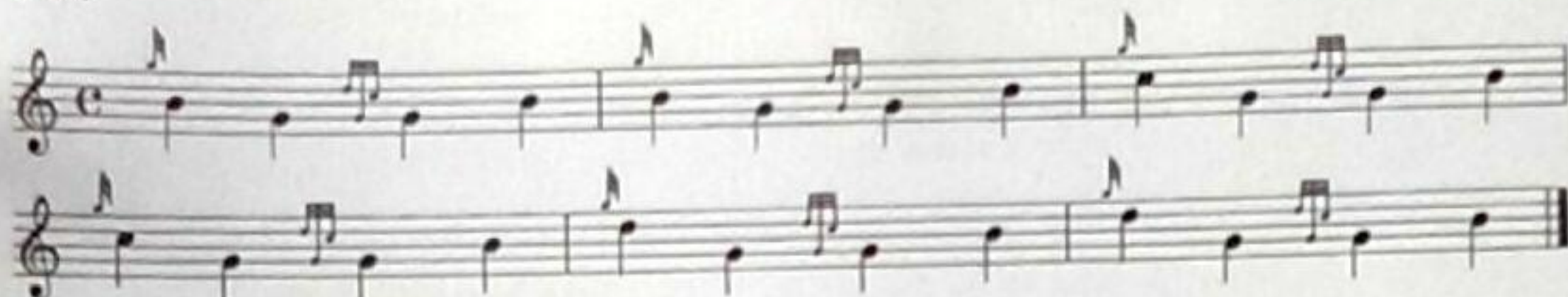
- a low G gracenote
- a D gracenote (the beat is here)
- a low G gracenote
- a C gracenote
- another low G gracenote
- a B to finish.

The exercises that follow stress the importance of well articulated low G gracenotes to start and end the *darado*. What occurs between these low G gracenotes could be thought of as an E doubling played using the D and C fingers. Be careful that the D and C gracenotes don’t fall on top of each other; separate them with the low G. It is the clear articulation of the three low G gracenotes in the *darado* that produces its characteristic bubble sound.

Exercise #94 is in 4/4 time. There is a beat on each quarter note. Of course, the beat on the *third quarter note* falls on the D gracenote. Play the exercise slowly and evenly. Exaggerate the slowness of the movement.

94

52-96 / 104-192



Next is a variant of #94. It uses the same notes, but they're written in 2/4 time. Some pointing is added to help you shorten the low G's to a more practical length. There are two beats in a bar — one on the first note of the first pair, and one on the D gracenote. Listen to the recording for clarification.

95

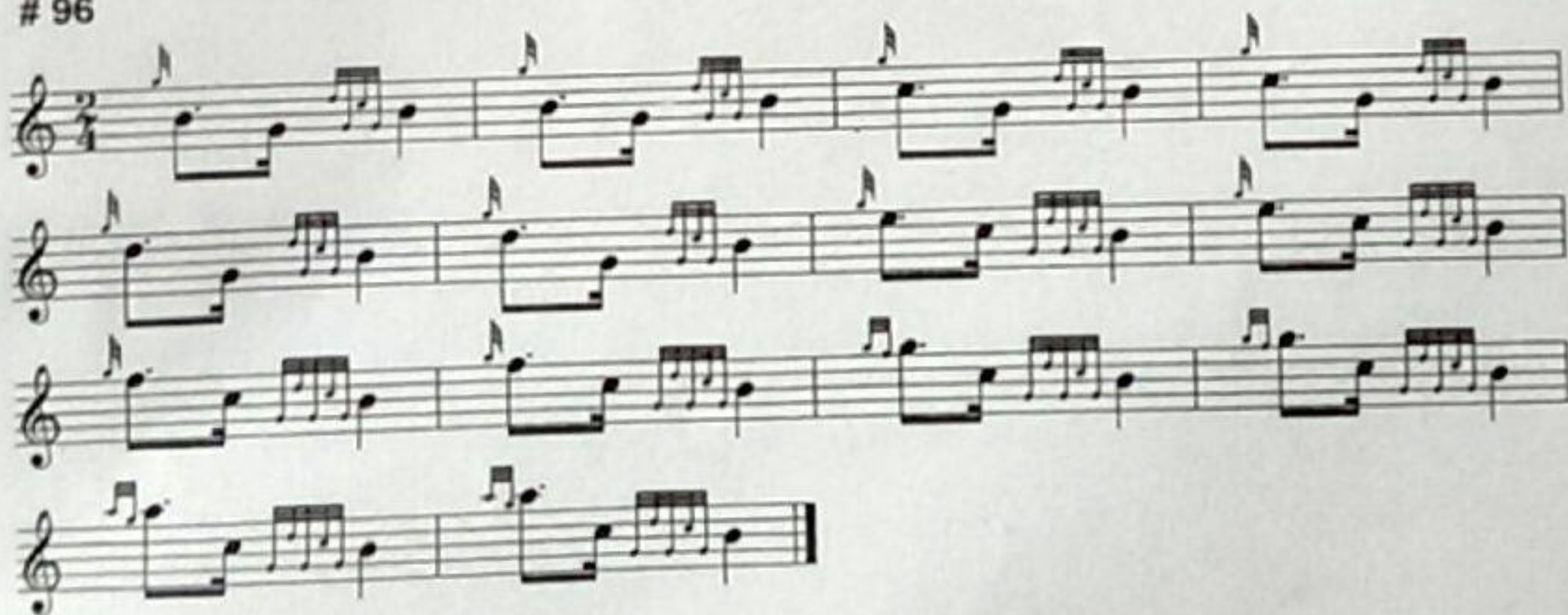
44-96 / 88-192



The following exercise shows the *darado* as you would commonly see it: in marches and strathspeys. *Sound the three low G gracenotes clearly.* If you can play this movement very well, you may try using the same rhythmic technique we talked about in the D throw. From bar 7 forward, where all the *darados* are all played from a C, you may wish to try to hit the beat on the first low G gracenote. This will give the movement a great rhythmic lift. If you're still at the learning stage with this embellishment, keep the D gracenote on the beat. Both are correct.

96

60-132 / 120-xxx



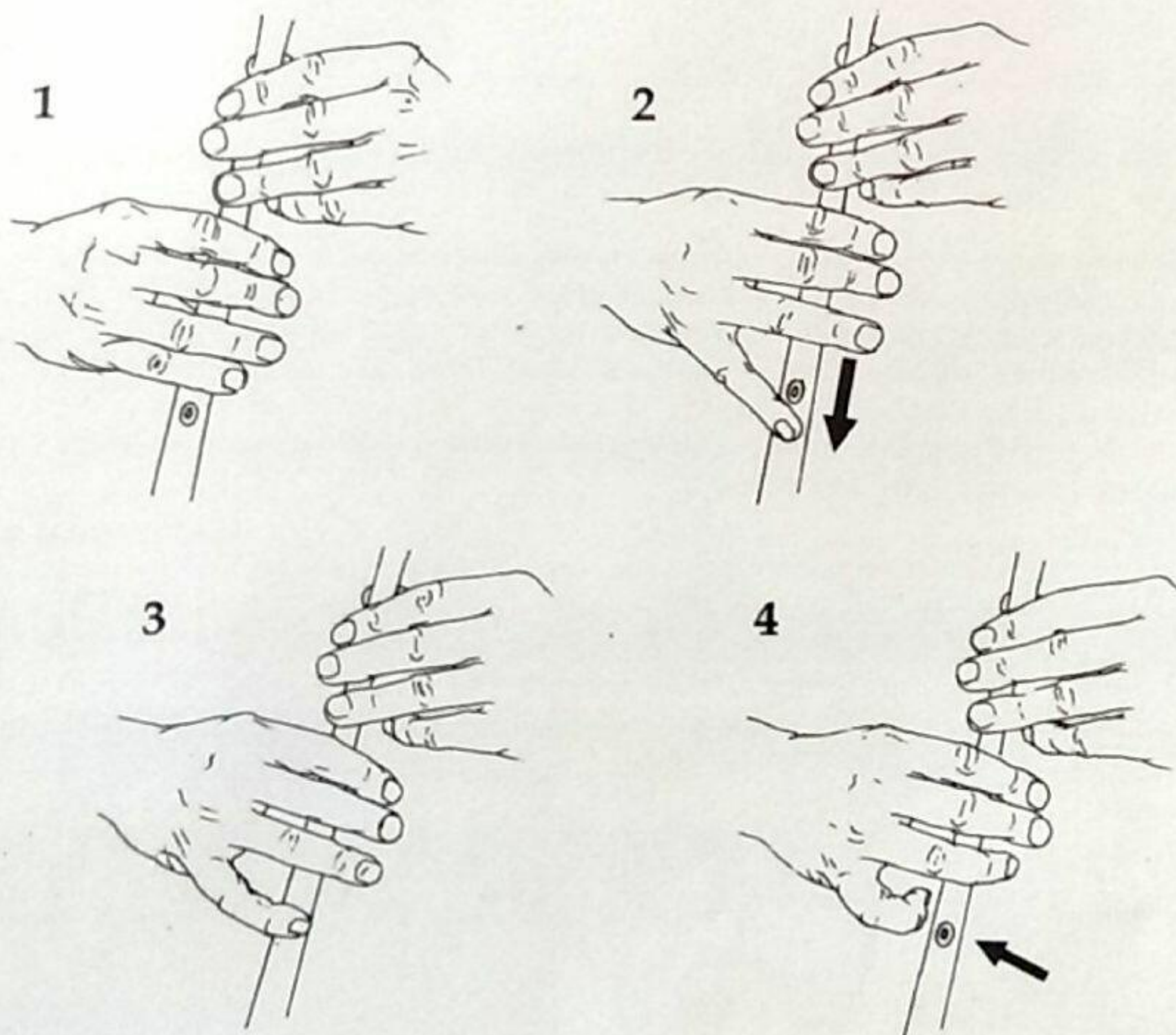
Birls

The birl is the bane of many a piper's existence. It's a strange, twisted trill, but extremely common, extremely versatile and quite lovely when played well.

No other piece of technique sees so many successful variations in the way it is played. Some pipers' birls look like worms having seizures. With others, you can barely see the finger move. The three most common ways the birl can be played are: the 'seven,' the 'tap-drag' and the 'double tap'.

The 'seven': So-called because the little finger traces the number '7' across the low A hole, the seven birl might also be called a 'sweep-drag'. The low A finger first sweeps across the hole from top to bottom. Then, from its position below the hole, the finger bends inward and slightly upward, dragging across the hole as it goes. The movement ends with the little finger bent nearly double. See Figure 8.

Figure 8



This is perhaps the smoothest and most flexible birl to play, provided your finger can handle the awkward inward-upward bending movement.

The 'tap-drag': This style of birl is solid and clear, but can be difficult to execute with smoothness from the top hand. The little finger, hovering directly above the hole, taps the low A once, then drags across it again as it bends inward, ending like the 'seven.'

The 'double tap': This is a common variant of the tap-drag. It omits the dragging motion altogether and just taps the low A hole twice.

Regrettably, there is no helpful, logical breakdown of the birl into easy steps, though you can, if you wish, practise the sweep or the drag by themselves. Most good players master the birl simply by choosing the style they want and playing millions of them. Avoid letting your entire bottom hand get bent out of shape as you play the birl. Keep the wrist straight and elevated.

In written music, you will find the birl represented in several different ways. It may be played with a leading low A, high G gracenote, or low G. But in all cases, the beat falls on the first gracenote in the birl.

The first exercise is as simple a birl drill as you'll ever see — repeated birls on low A. The beat is on the first low G in the movement.

42-132 / 84-xxx

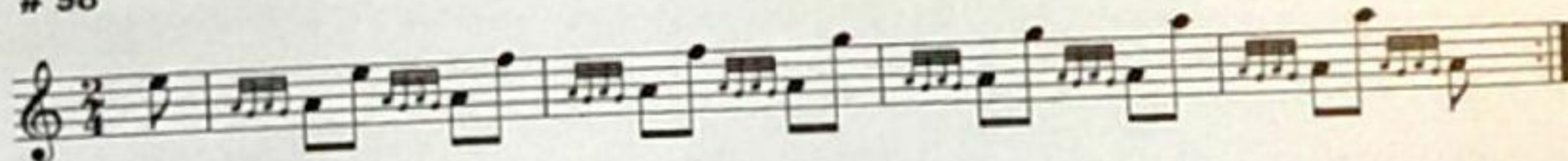
97



Now we'll try birls from each of the top hand notes. This is where the smoothness of the 'seven' becomes apparent. Again, the beat is on the first gracenote in the movement — in this case the low A.

36-132 / 72-xxx

98



Next, add some pointing.

36-132 / 72-xxx

99



Here is a variant on the very simple #97 — repeated birls on low A, but beginning with a high G gracenote, which is on the beat.

100

36-132 / 72-xxx



Now, the G-gracenote birl from the top-hand notes.

101

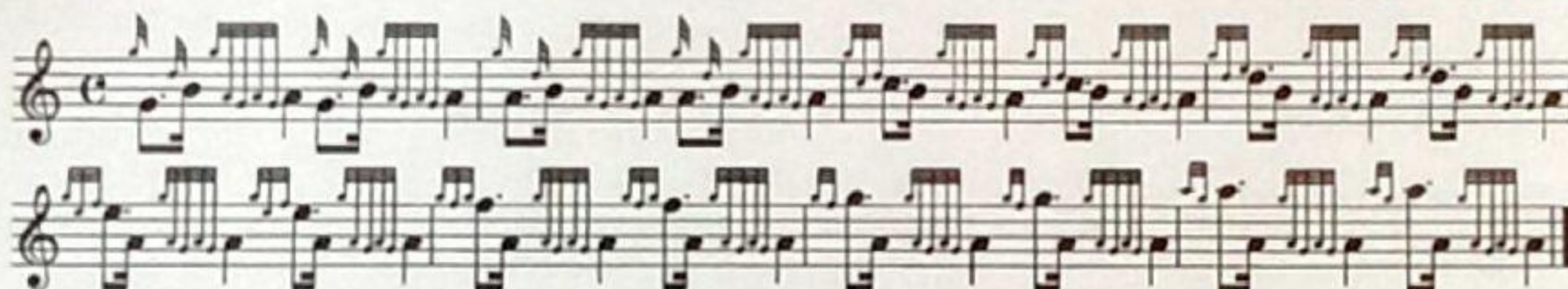
36-132 / 72-xxx



Let's turn to a strathspey exercise that makes ample use of the G-gracenote birl. Hold the dotted eighth notes, but keep the following sixteenth audible. Hit the G gracenote in the birl squarely on the beat.

102

36-132 / 72-xxx



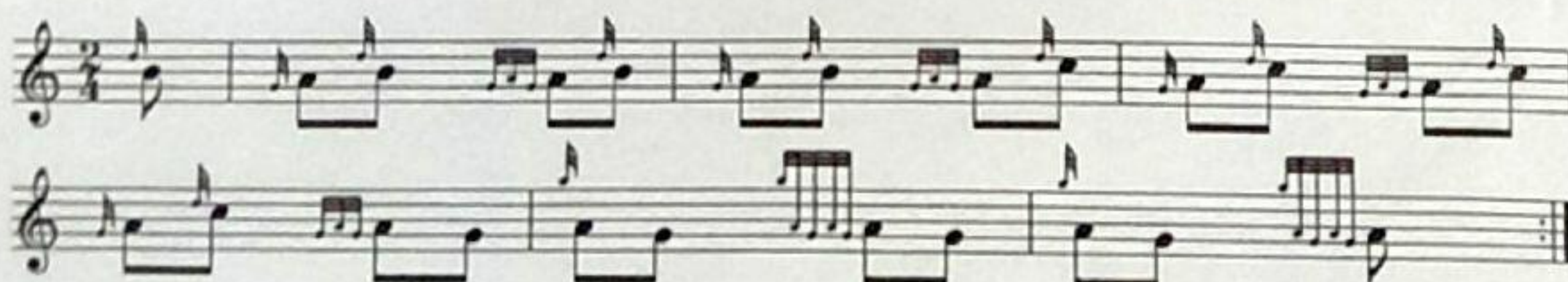
We'll end the birl section with a very difficult exercise that puts the birl in its most awkward context. The first two bars of #103 ask you to play a birl straight to low G from B and C. There is no leading low A; instead the movement starts with the first tap – squarely on the low G and on the beat. This is difficult. Some players find it best to play the tap-drag in this context. But feel free to play the birl with which you're most comfortable.

The second two bars of #103 challenge you with a high G-gracenote birl played from low G. This is one of the trickiest movements in piping, and, though it is not common, you will eventually meet one. Resist the temptation to come up to the G gracenote early; hit it squarely on the beat.

In both of these birls you get a chance to practise the leading gracenote by itself first.

103

36-84 / 72-168



Chapter 5

Strikes

Strikes are only one name by which these chanter-slapping movements are known. They are also called 'hits', 'taps', 'echoes' or 'shakes', though the latter two are falling out of common usage. Strikes are another way, besides gracenotes, of separating two notes of the same pitch. Such tools are necessary because pipers cannot 'tongue' or stop the sound of their chanter. Strikes can be played on any note except low G. They can be almost anywhere relative to the beat — on it, after it, or on the off-beat. Because of their rhythmic versatility, it is helpful to practise them in several time signatures. The strike exercises that follow are based on a few basic models rendered in 4/4, 6/8 and 2/4 time.

B strikes

The first strike exercise is a simple scale pattern in 4/4 time — four beats in a bar. There is:

- a beat on the first note in each pair of eighth notes
- a beat on each strike.

Hit the strike accurately — that is, both fingers must tap and leave the chanter at the same time. Don't sit on the low G: strike it and bounce right off again. Stay on the quarter note for a full beat.

104

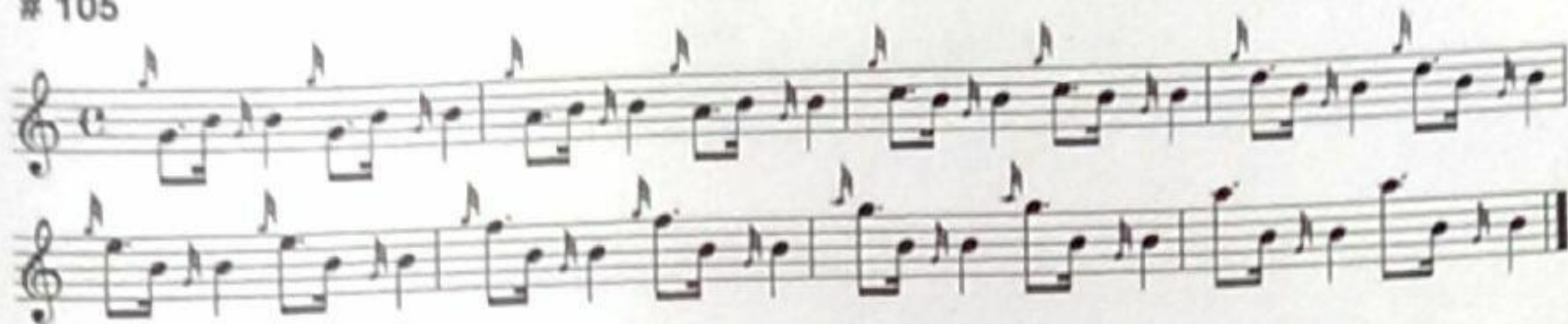
52-132 / 104-xxx



Here is the same exercise with pointing. The rhythmic pattern is the same as above, but the first note is pointed. The strikes are again on the second and fourth beats. Don't over-cut the note before the strike. Keep it open and clear.

105

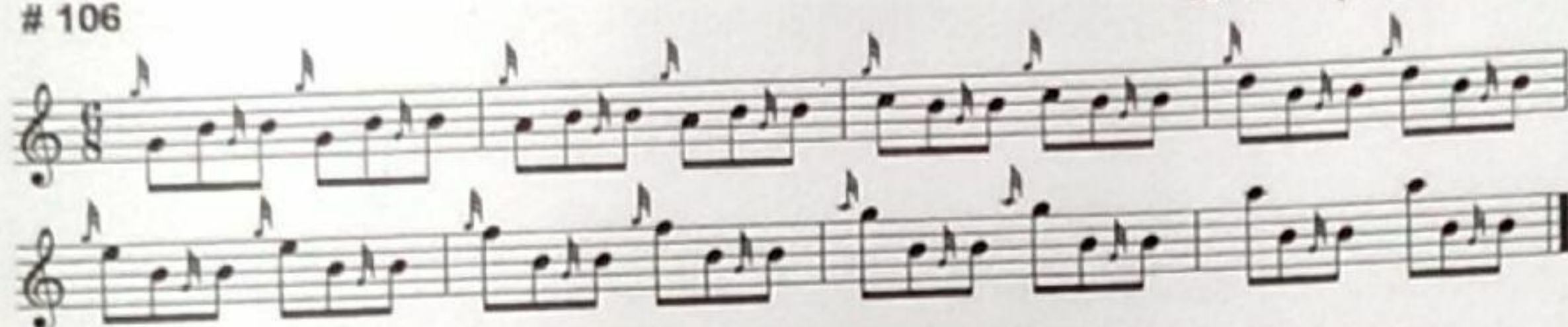
52-132 / 104-xxx



Try the same pattern in 6/8 time. Now the beat is on the first note in each group of three. There is no beat on the strike, though if you triple-time this exercise you will find that the strike is one of six pulses in each bar. Treat this exercise like a jig — round but never pushed. Keep the B before the strike very open.

106

40-126 / (x3) 120-xxx

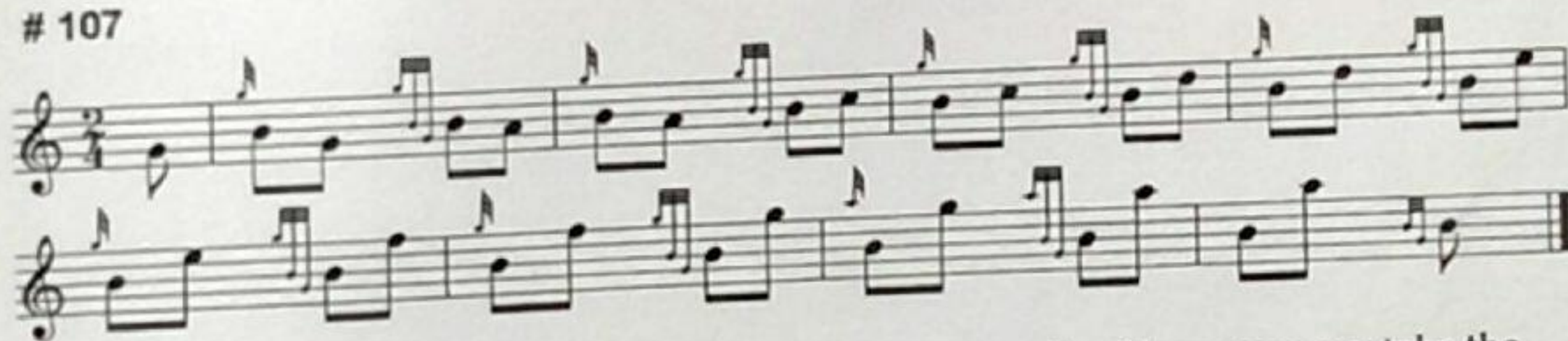


You can turn the above exercise into a 6/8 march pattern on your own simply by pointing the first note in each group and cutting the second. Again, be careful not to over-cut the short B before the strike.

Now we'll put a G gracenote in front of the strike. Be careful to play the G gracenote on the beat, just as you would in a B doubling.

107

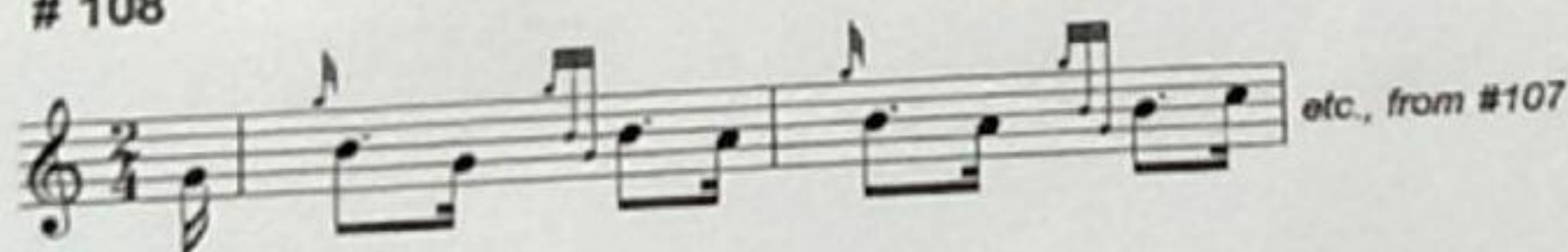
42-84 / 84-168



Try the same exercise with some pointing. Here are a couple of bars; you can take the rest from #107:

108

42-84 / 84-168

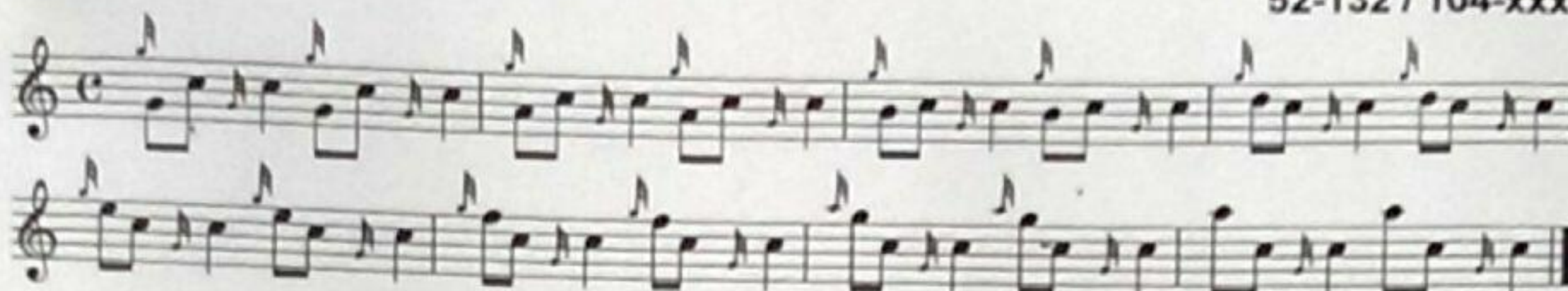


C strikes

Follow the B-strike pattern above for this group of exercises.

109

52-132 / 104-xxx



110

52-132 / 104-xxx



111

40-126 / (x3) 120-xxx



Try a pointed version of #111; give the first two notes in each group of three a dot-cut pattern.

In #112 and #113, remember to play the G gracenote on the beat, not the strike.

112

42-84 / 84-168



113

42-84 / 84-168

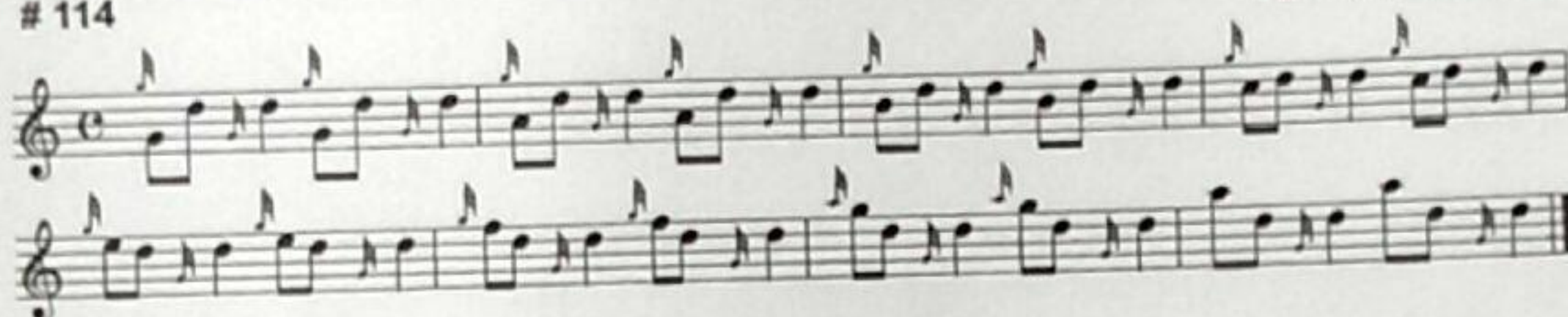


D strikes

Apply all the instructions for B and C strikes.

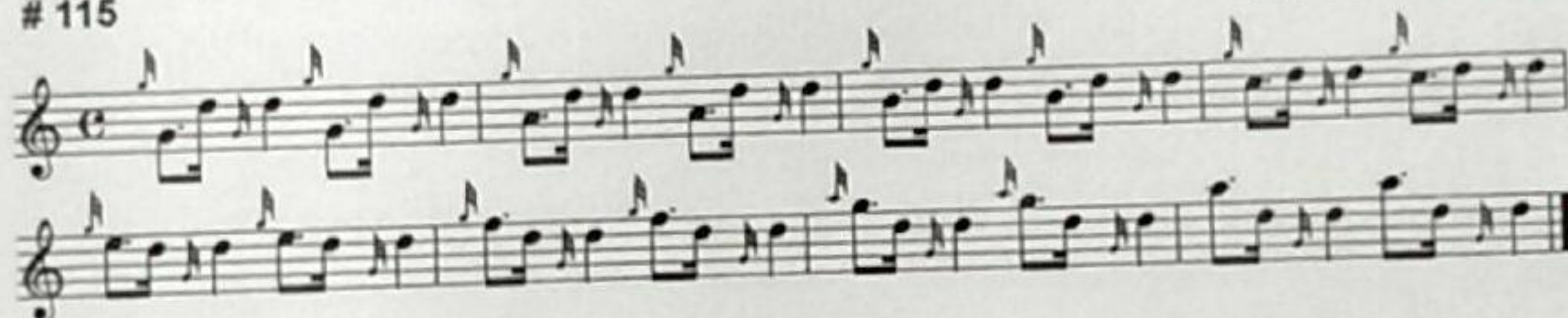
114

52-132 / 104-xxx



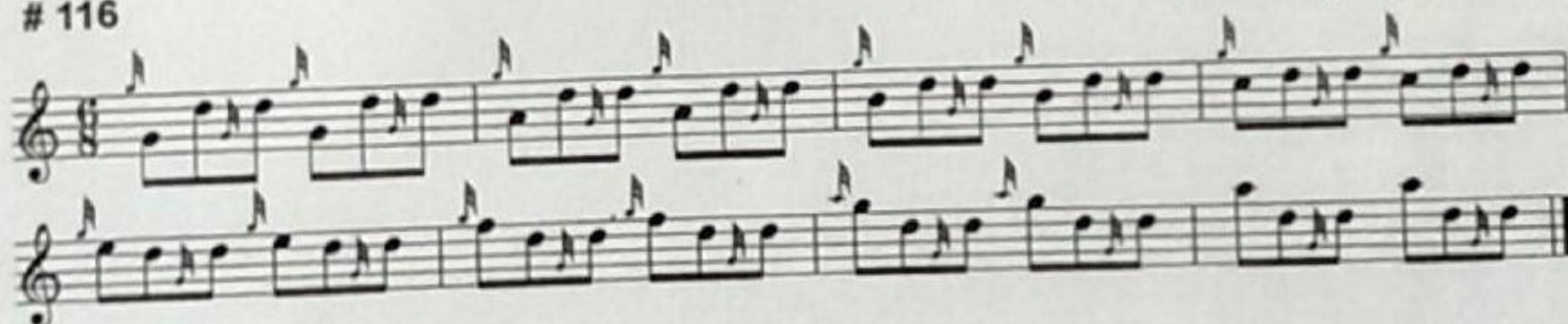
115

52-132 / 104-xxx



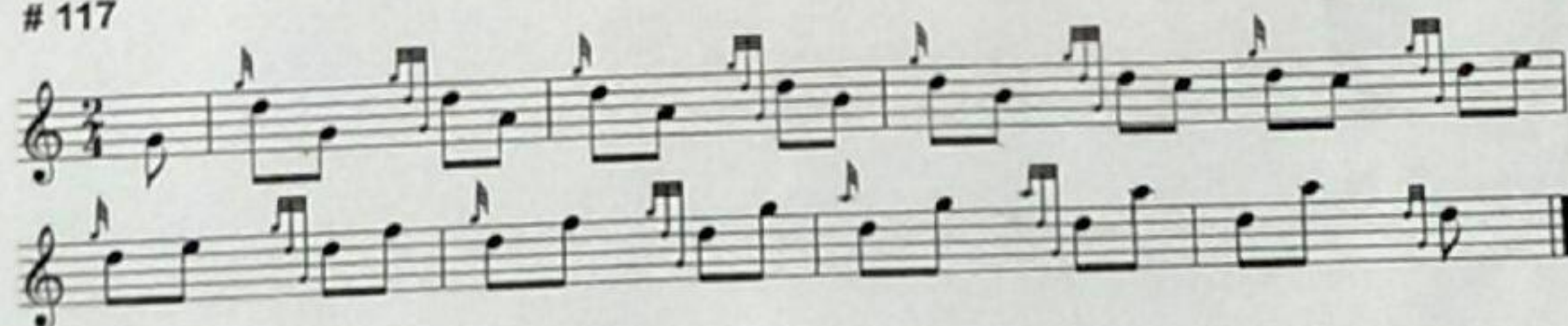
116

40-126 / (x3) 120-xxx



117

42-84 / 84-168



118

42-84 / 84-168



Here's a wrinkle. The combination of the D throw and the G-gracenote/D strike shown below is a very common way to end parts in marches. The D throw in this exercise is on the off-beat. Put the G gracenote before the strike on the second beat in the bar.

119

50-132 / 100-xxx



Alternate D strike

You should know that there is an alternate way to play the D strike in these exercises. It is to play the strike not as a full hit to low G, but as a one-finger hit to C – just gently bounce the D finger off the chanter. This is still a common and accepted variant on the D strike, though in recent decades it has mostly given way to the full low G hit, which is now the norm among most of the best pipers.

E strikes

The same pattern of exercises continues. The E strike is on the beat in the next two. Hit the strike in a bouncing motion; don't rest the E finger on the chanter.

120

52-132 / 104-xxx



121

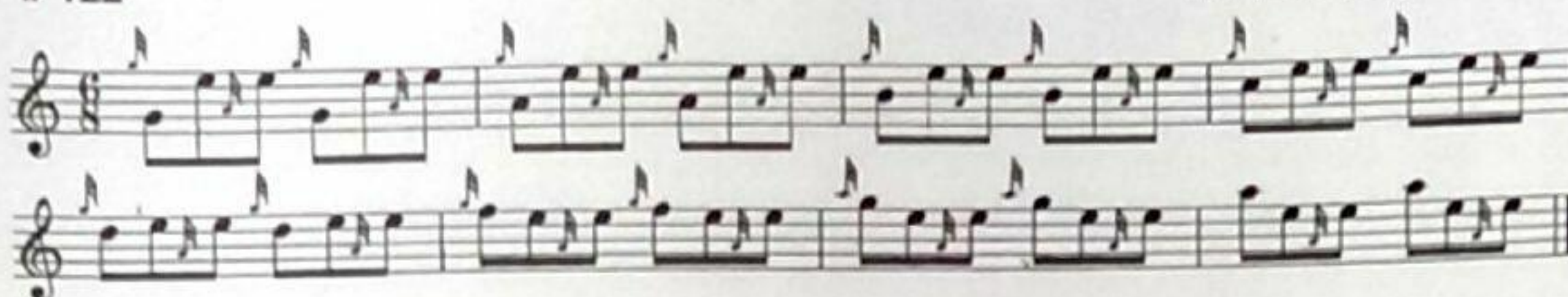
52-132 / 104-xxx



In the next two, the beat is on the first note in each group of three. Keep the E before the strike open and well articulated.

122

40-126 / (x3) 120-xxx



123

40-96 / (x3) 120-xxx

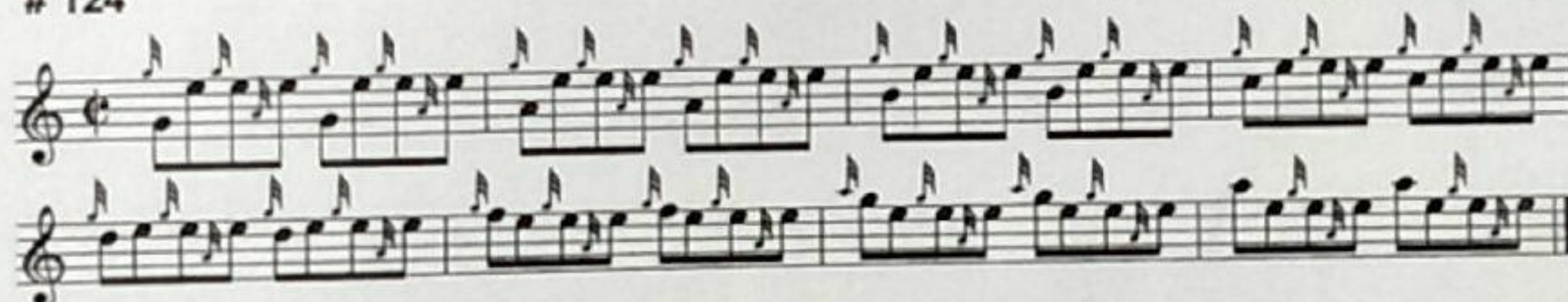


The next E-strike exercise is a rhythmic pattern that has become very popular in reels and hornpipes. The beat is on the first note in each group of four. When you double-time this one, you find that the G gracenote before the strike is on the off-beat. The strike itself is not on a beat or an off-beat. A common fault in this combination of gracenotes is to make the E before the strike too small. This challenge here is to:

- Put the G gracenote on E on the offbeat.
- Keep the E before the strike clear and open.
- Play the exercise very round.

124

52-92 / 104-184



Since reels and hornpipes can be played in both a round and a more pointed style, try the same exercise with some pointing. Now it is more crucial than ever not to crush the E before the strike. The G gracenote on E is still on the off-beat.

125

52-92 / 104-184



F strikes

The F-strike exercises follow the same pattern as those for the E strike. Note that the F strike is a single-finger strike like the E. Some pipers mistakenly play this as a two-finger strike to low A, though frankly, this is quite nice too. But it would be best to play it as written. The strike is on the beat in the following two.

126

52-132 / 104-xxx



127

52-132 / 104-xxx



It is very easy with the F strike to crush the F before the hit. Be careful to articulate this note clearly, especially in the next two exercises.

128

40-126 / (x3) 120-xxx



129

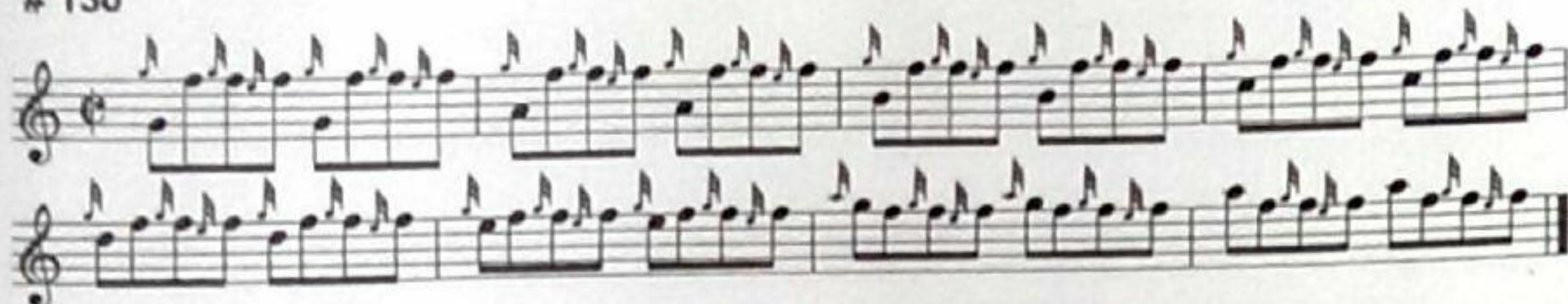
40-96 / (x3) 120-xxx



Here are two reel/hornpipe exercises like those in the E-strike section above. This quick gracenote and strike on F is not easy, especially at a higher tempo, nor is it very common.

130

52-92 / 104-184



131

52-92 / 104-184



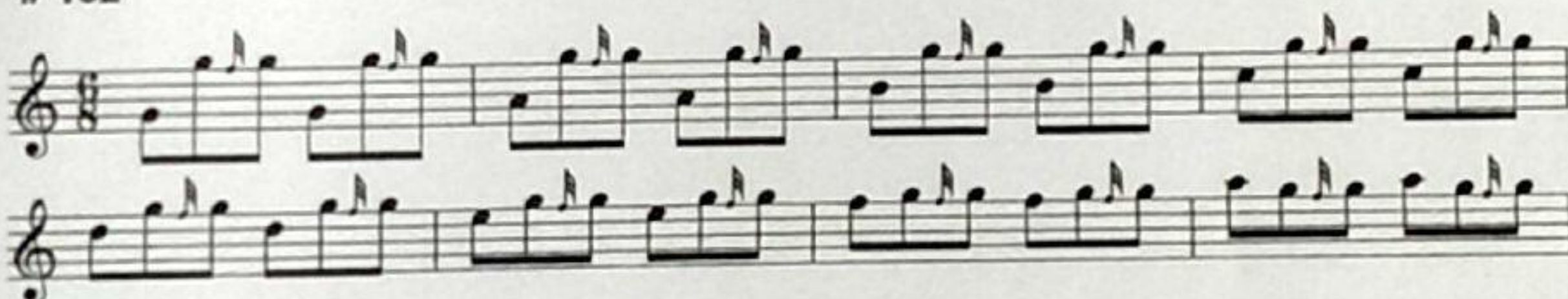
High G strikes

The high G strike is fairly limited in its usage. We'll try only a couple of exercises here, though you can easily adapt any of the other strike exercises to the high G movement. As we'll discuss in the final chapter, such adaptability and creativity are important in developing exercises that suit your particular needs.

The crucial point in playing the high G strike, is to avoid playing a high G doubling. The note before the strike is open and clear. Here is the jig exercise. Keep the tempo down to start. There are no strikes on the beat in this exercise.

132

40-126 / (x3) 120-xxx



Above, feel free to add a high A gracenote to the first note in each group of three. You could add pointing to the first note in each group to turn this into a 6/8-march exercise.

The following gracenote combination tends to be played only by advanced pipers, but pipers at any level can practise it slowly to help improve top-hand agility. There are two beats in each bar.

133

52-126 / (x3) 156-xxx



High A strikes

As with the high G strike, the trickiest part of the high A strike is to avoid playing a high A doubling. Here, the high A before the hit must be given its full value. Play this jig exercise very evenly.

134

40-126 / (x3) 120-xxx



Again, you can add some pointing to the first note in each group of three to turn #134 into a 6/8-march exercise. But keep the high A before the hit very open.

Here is the jig simulation, once again aimed at more advanced players, but useful at all levels. You may wish to play the two high A hits as a down-sweep followed by an up-sweep.

135

52-126 / (x3) 156-xxx



Doubling-strikes

This common but difficult combination of a doubling and a strike goes by very few names, if any at all. Some call it a 'double-strike', which it is not, or 'shake', which it may be. Some call it a 'double-catch' or a 'roll', after a similar movement in Irish piping. Often, you'll hear it called just a 'HUB-ba-duh', which is perhaps as good a name as any. Whatever its name, this intricate movement is a mainstay of modern hornpipe playing and is in the technical repertoire of any fairly advanced player.

It is played on B, C or D, and consists of a G-E gracenote combination on the melody note (as though you were playing a D doubling), followed by a strike.

It's easy to become intimidated by this splash of gracenotes and to play the movement too quickly, running all the gracenotes together and losing its strong rhythmic effect.

But at its best, the doubling-strike is open and clearly articulated, with every gracenote sounding clearly and well separated from the rest. Speed is not a priority.

In all of the following exercises we'll dissect the doubling-strike into its component parts, as we did with doublings. We'll begin with the B doubling-strike. In the first bar of #135 you'll:

- Play a plain G gracenote from low G to B, then return to low G.
- Play a doubling with the gracenotes G-E from low G to B, then return to low G.
- Play the G-E doubling from low G to B and finish with a B strike.

Got it?

As with the doublings we studied early in the book, the key here is to play the components as clearly when the whole movement is played as you do when they are played separately. In other words, play the G gracenote in the G-E doubling as accurately as you would play it alone. Do the same with the G-E doubling before the strike. Don't let the conglomerated movement throw you off.

The beat in #136 is on the G gracenote. In fact, wherever the doubling-strike is played, the beat or offbeat is always on the G gracenote. Try to play the B doubling-strike slowly, and very open. There are three beats in each bar here and they fall on the first note in each couplet.

136

36-80 / 72-160



Now we'll try the same movement in a different context, with a set-up note before it. This is a very common hornpipe element. The first half of each bar lets you practise the G-E doubling by itself, and the second half adds the tap. A key here is to keep the B before the doubling-strike clear and open; it is a platform for the doubling-strike. There are two beats in each bar; they fall on the first note in each group of three.

137

36-90 / 72-180



Now let's try the same pair of exercises on C. Keep the doubling-strike open and rhythmical.

138

36-80 / 72-160



139

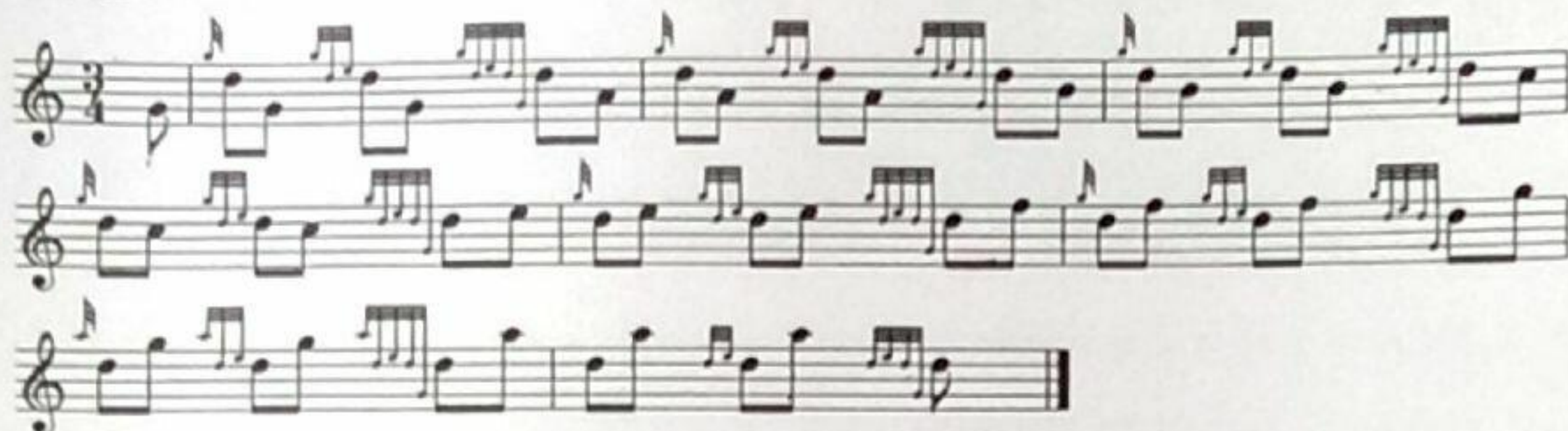
36-90 / 72-180



Finally, here's the doubling-strike on D, its most frequent host. As with the alternate D strike (see page 71) the strike can be played as a touch to C rather than to low G, though the full strike is most common today.

140

36-80 / 72-160



141

36-90 / 72-180



Chapter 6

Moving On

That was a lot of exercises. You'll find that many of them become committed to memory quite quickly with a little repetition. Of course, you would never be expected to play all of them all of the time. Some of them some of the time might be a more realistic goal. Key your exercise practice time toward movements you would like to improve. As mentioned earlier, a good portion of the single-gracenoting exercises should always be in your repertoire.

A few wrap-up issues should be addressed before you're turned loose with 141 exercises.

Making the transition to tunes

A frequently asked question is, "How do I transfer the technical work I've done in the exercises on my practice chanter to tunes on my bagpipe?" The answer: if you've done your practice chanter homework and your pipes are going well, this transfer should happen automatically. Don't expect it to happen on Day 1; on the other hand, it won't take long unless you encounter the bagpipe roadblock discussed later.

As you play tunes on your practice chanter, you will begin to notice some of the benefits described in the first chapter. You'll find that less effort has to go into playing simple technique and that you hit more of the movements more of the time. The idea of practising technique separately from the pipes and the tunes ensures that the technique is given a chance to improve. Trust the process: if it's getting better on the chanter, it will get better on the pipes.

Following the same principles, singing the tunes to yourself without the encumbrance of technique or the instrument can help improve the purely musical side of your playing. Separating music from the technique makes the music easier to understand. Another book could be written on the musicality of pipe music. Suffice it to say that if you address the technique through exercises and the music through singing, the two should meet on the bagpipe with improved results.

This is all to say that you shouldn't really have to do anything conscious to transfer your newly improved technique to tunes on the bagpipe. Improvements should come naturally with time.

The bagpipe roadblock

Nothing can block your efforts at improving technique more than a bagpipe that is too hard to blow or that is in any way uncomfortable to play. There is an unfortunate myth among many pipers that pipes must be stiff or difficult to blow if they are to contribute to the sound of the pipe band. Nothing could be further from the truth. While a solid and vibrant sound is desirable, any physical difficulties you have detract from your ultimate goal of playing good music with good technique. If you sacrifice finesse for volume, you end up with bad piping that is very loud.

Many top pipers will tell you that an indicator that their instrument has become too hard is the consistent missing of technique that should be automatic — particularly top-hand work. This applies to pipers at all levels and is particularly valid if you are doing exercise work. If you find that you are missing technique on the bagpipe that you can make on the practice chanter, there is a good chance your pipes are too hard or are taking too much air.

When this is the case, one of these problems could be at fault:

- Your chanter reed is too hard.
- Your drone reeds are taking too much air.
- Your bag is leaking.
- Your bag is too large or not tied in properly for you.

Often, these problems exhibit the same symptoms — playing discomfort, technical misses, chokes, poor posture and laboured or rushed playing. If you are having these kinds of problems consistently, especially when you can play the material fairly well on the practice chanter, think about blaming your pipes, not yourself.

Seek out expert one-on-one help with your pipes. In lieu of this, talk to other pipers. Some have a knack for getting pipes going well. They may even let you try their pipes. Blowing a top-notch set of pipes even for a minute or two can be an eye-opener. Ask what reeds that person is playing and how they set their pipes up. Most pipers are happy to talk about their pipes.

The bottom line: don't let an unmanageable instrument ruin all the hard work you put into your technique. Playing pipes should not be painful, unpleasant or a constant chore.

Creating your own exercises

The exercises in this book will help you address a wide array of problems or inconsistencies in technique. But they may not meet your every gracenoting need. Change what is here as you wish, and try to create your own exercises. A good exercise

need only be a bar or two; it may grow into something more, as many of these did. You don't even have to write your exercise down. Most of these exercises were created, played, forgotten and remembered again long before they were ever written down.

All of them developed out of the need to improve a certain piece of technique. Sometimes an existing exercise was used as a model for a new one. Other times a simple two-bar pattern evolved over several weeks into eight or sixteen bars until a full-fledged tune simulation was born. For your purposes, address whatever is needed to improve a specific gracenoting pattern by itself or in a particular context. Don't worry about whether the resulting exercise is musically attractive. With time, a melody or certain character might find its way into the piece.

Above all, make sure your exercises have rhythm. If they don't have a solid beat and the gracenotes are not played in rhythm, your improvements on the practice chanter will not move to tunes on the pipes as effectively as they could.

This is, after all, what rhythmic fingerwork is all about.