tonebase

THE DOUBLE BASSIST'S

ULTIMATE DAILY WARM-UP ROUTINE

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DOUBLE BASS

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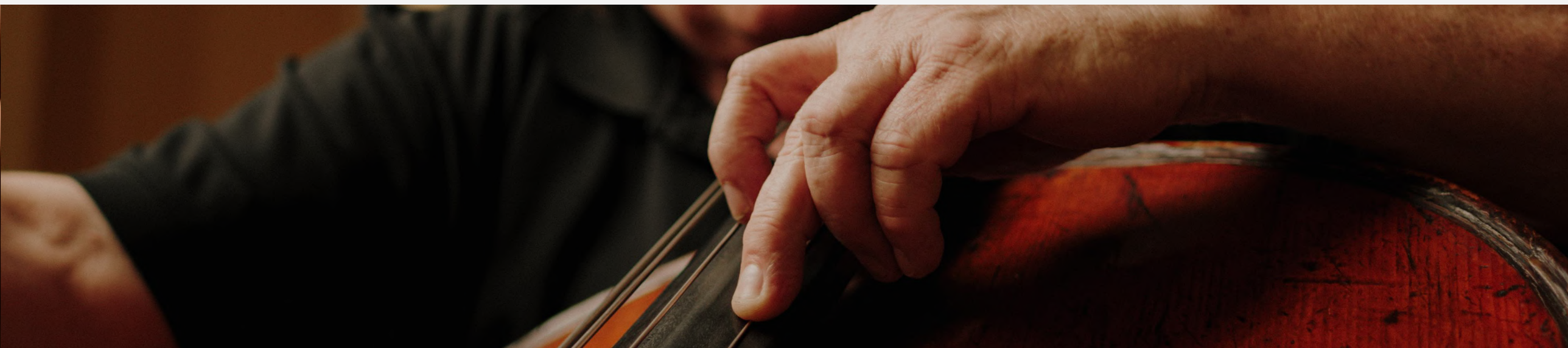


About the Author

Joel Quarrington

In late 2023 Joel Quarrington was awarded the “Order of Canada”, which recognizes his artistic contribution to Canada’s cultural life.

For over forty years, Joel Quarrington served as the Principal Double Bassist of many ensembles including the Canadian Opera Company, the Toronto Symphony, Canada’s National Arts Centre Orchestra, and most recently, the famous London Symphony Orchestra. He has won the Geneva International Competition and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s National Talent Competition.

He has been a guest teacher at schools all around the world and he holds annual masterclasses in the summers at Quebec's Orford Arts Centre. He is a professor at the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal, and at the Royal Academy of Music in London where he is a Visiting Professor.

Joel has made several solo recordings, which have won both the prestigious JUNO and Opus Prizes. Joel has received a Special Recognition Award for Outstanding Solo Performance and for Outstanding Orchestral Performance from the International Society of Bassists.

He performs on an Italian bass made in 1660 by the Italian master Santo Paolo Maggini.

Introduction

The way I teach the double bass, it's all about **learning how to BALANCE!**

That means learning how to drape yourself on your instrument and just being all "jellyfish" with your body: zero tension, zero flexed muscle, zero pressing, zero grabbing... just effortless playing.

To do that you need a posture that supports freedom and a technique that allows very flexible, supple wrists so you can literally "hang" your arms and fingers on the bass. I make the claim to my students that once they learn how to "hang" (balance) themselves they don't really have to practice any mechanical technique anymore.

The purpose of the warm-up I am presenting is to directly address the motions and balances to wake up the fluidity and avoid the natural human reaction to press down and grab when intensifying one's activities.

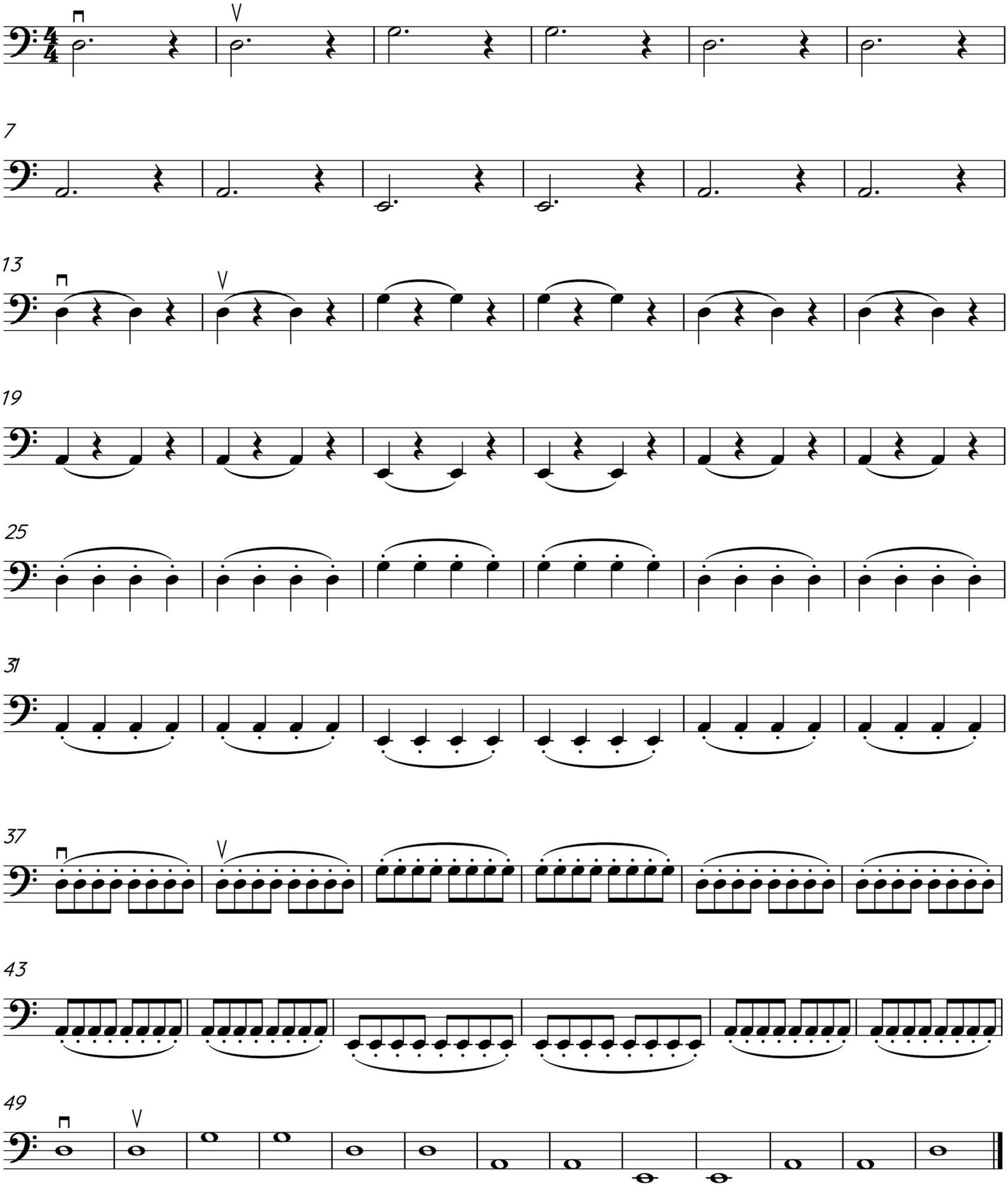
Exercise #1

This is playing open strings and finding the weight of your bow arm to be able to start and stop the string with the bow throughout its length without ever pressing down. The bottom string is the hardest, so when I warm up, I usually focus on that string.

Please make sure you start this exercise without rosining your bow! Warm up the residue rosin first and if you really need it, then add the least rosin possible. Adding rosin will defeat the whole purpose of hanging your total arm weight and learning how to use speed (slow) to control the string.

Every bow change should show the right wrist motion of pull/push in every exercise I am mentioning today.

Exercise #1 (cont.)



Exercise #2

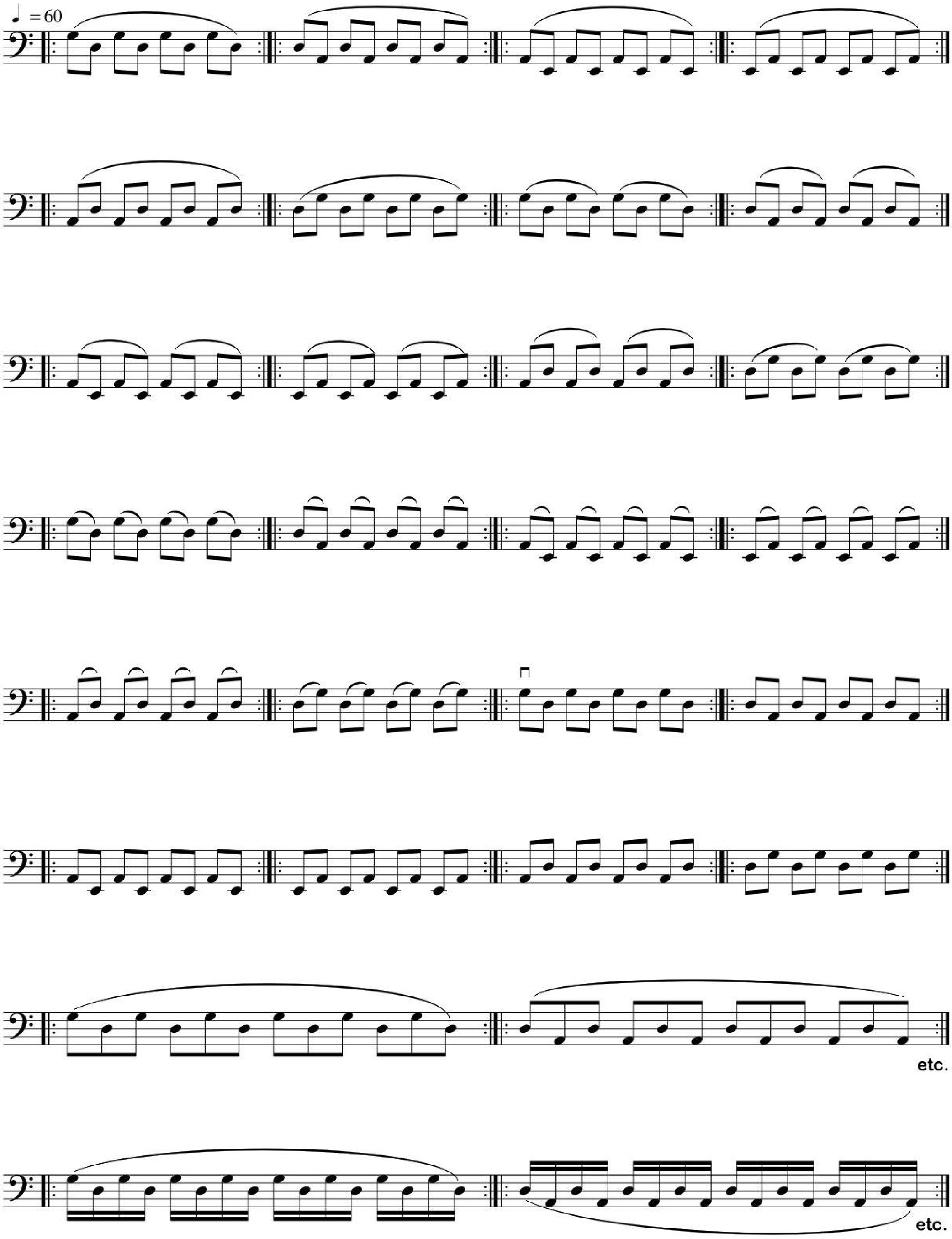
Do this as close to the bridge as you can; the closer you do it, the more you get out of it.

Use the wrist or just fingers to change between the strings; try for no arm motion up and down at all.

The sound should be full, focused and beautiful, and the fundamental note should pop out without any pressing at all.

I have written it out so that a group can do this together, but feel free to repeat slurs without regard to time signatures if you want.

Exercise #2 (cont.)



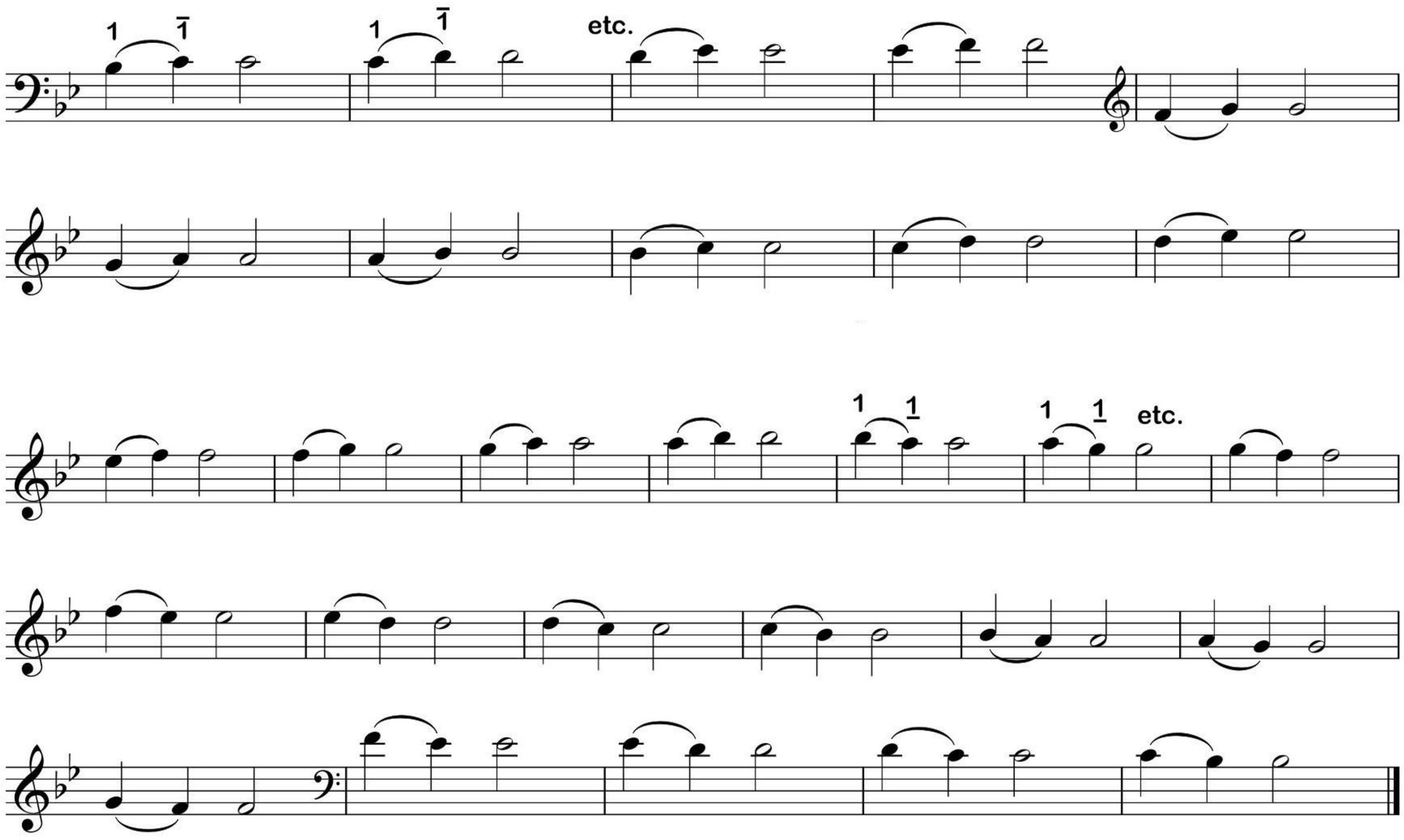
Exercise #3

This exercise really does warm up the fingertips! Learning how to hang on the 1st finger sets up all the others so it is the most important.

Do this without vibrato at the beginning to make sure your balance is good, and then play with varied vibratos that are non-stop.

It’s a good time to practice your most intense vibrato.

Note In my fingering system, the dash above a finger number indicates a shift up (towards the bridge); the dash below indicates a shift down (towards the scroll).

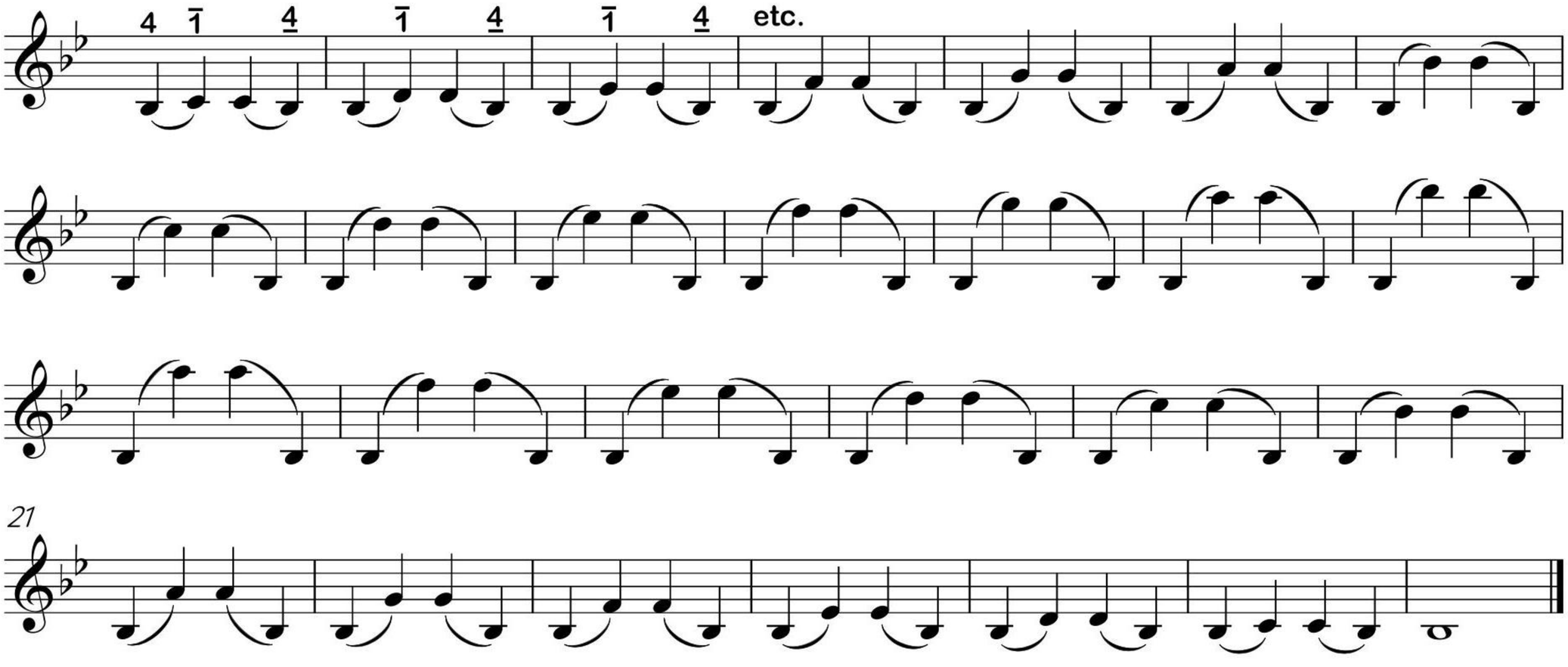


Exercise #4

I make the claim that being able to do even glissandos is fundamental to the essence of effortless playing.

This 4-1 fingering allows the greatest rotation of the hand and the slight “sliding” into motion of the finger note to note guides the intonation.

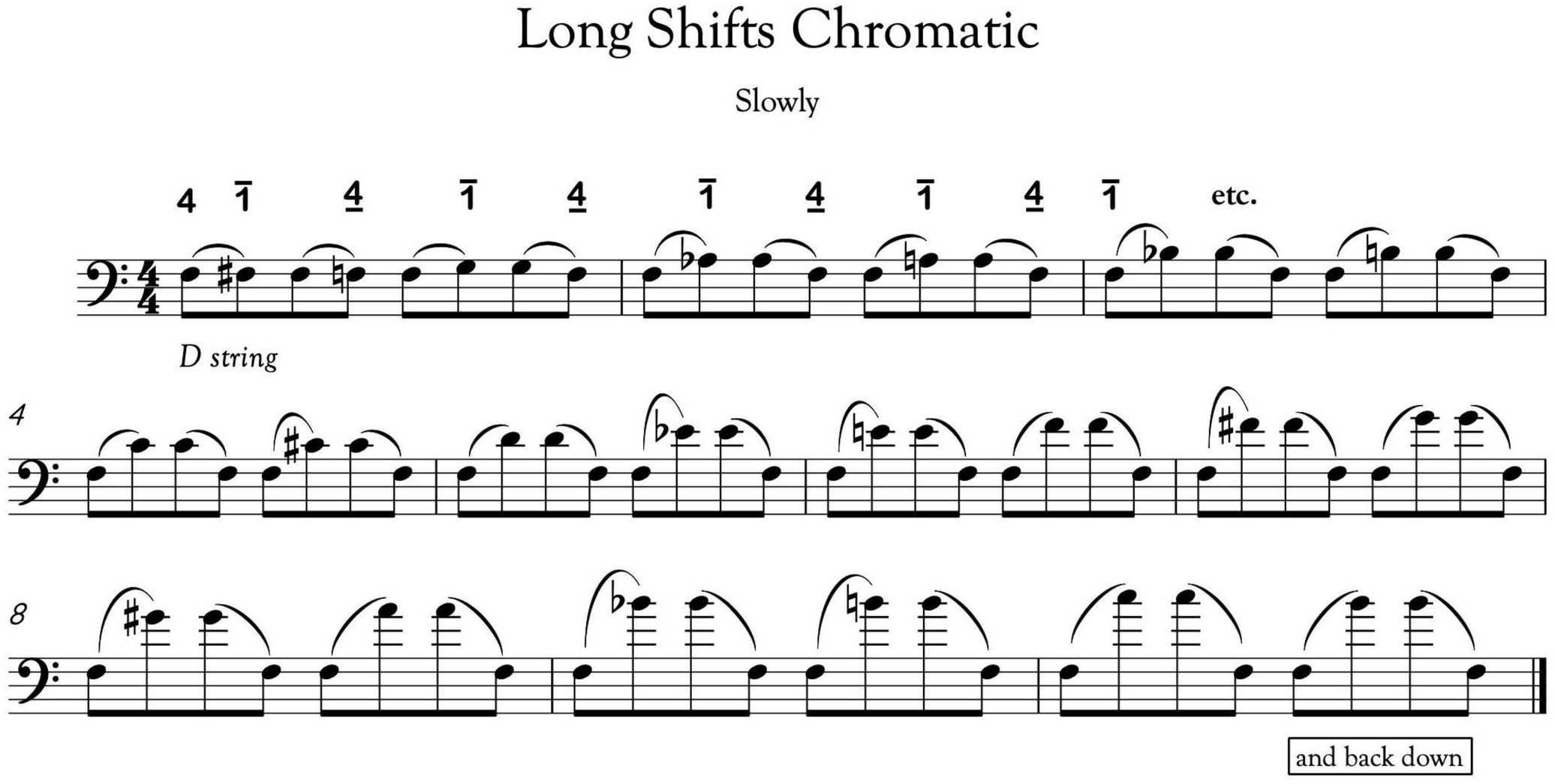
This exercise connects the finger to the ear. Play by ear, not positions!



Exercise #5

This is a more difficult way to do exercise 4. It is great for ear-training, and I have shown it on the D string for added challenge.

I don’t bother repeating these exercises with every combo possible; but if I had to prioritize them, I would do 4-1, 1-1, 2-2, 3-3, 4-4, 4-2.

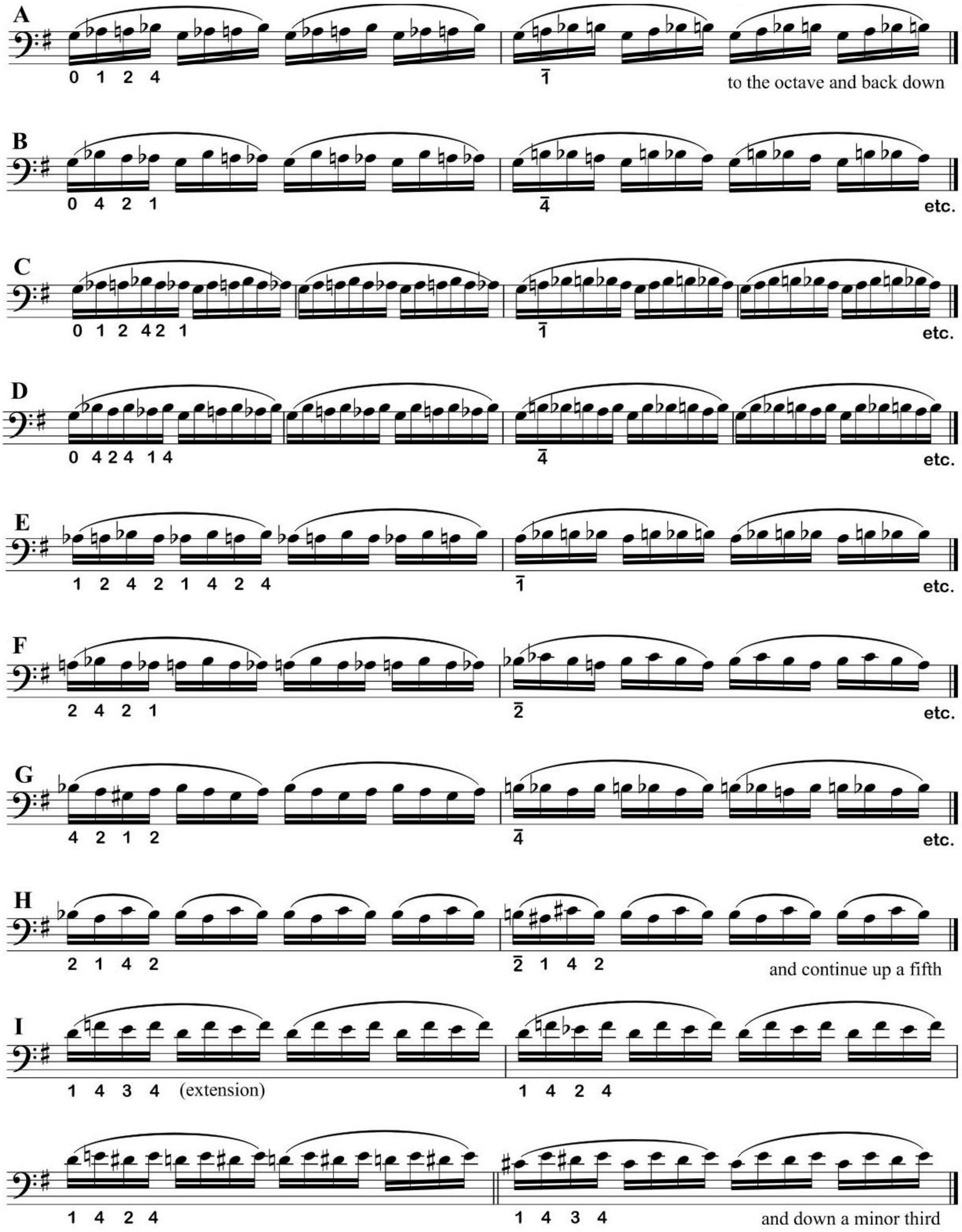


Exercise #6

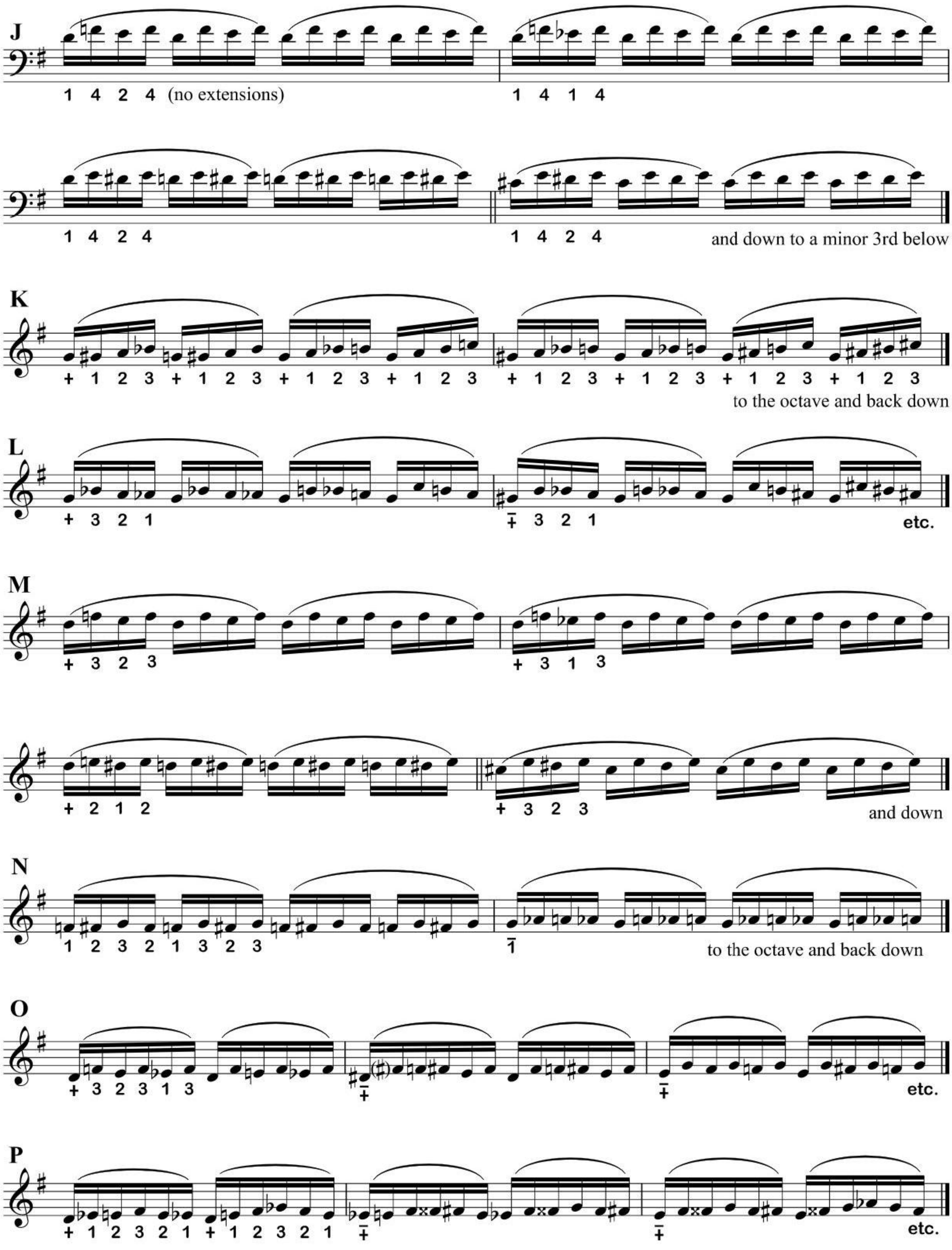
The hand rotation that allows you to balance on all the fingers is practiced here. These patterns should sound even, fast, and brilliant!

When I must warm up quickly, I always play examples E and N. Don’t overdo these and if you ever feel pain, stop!

Exercise #6 (cont.)



Exercise #6 (cont.)

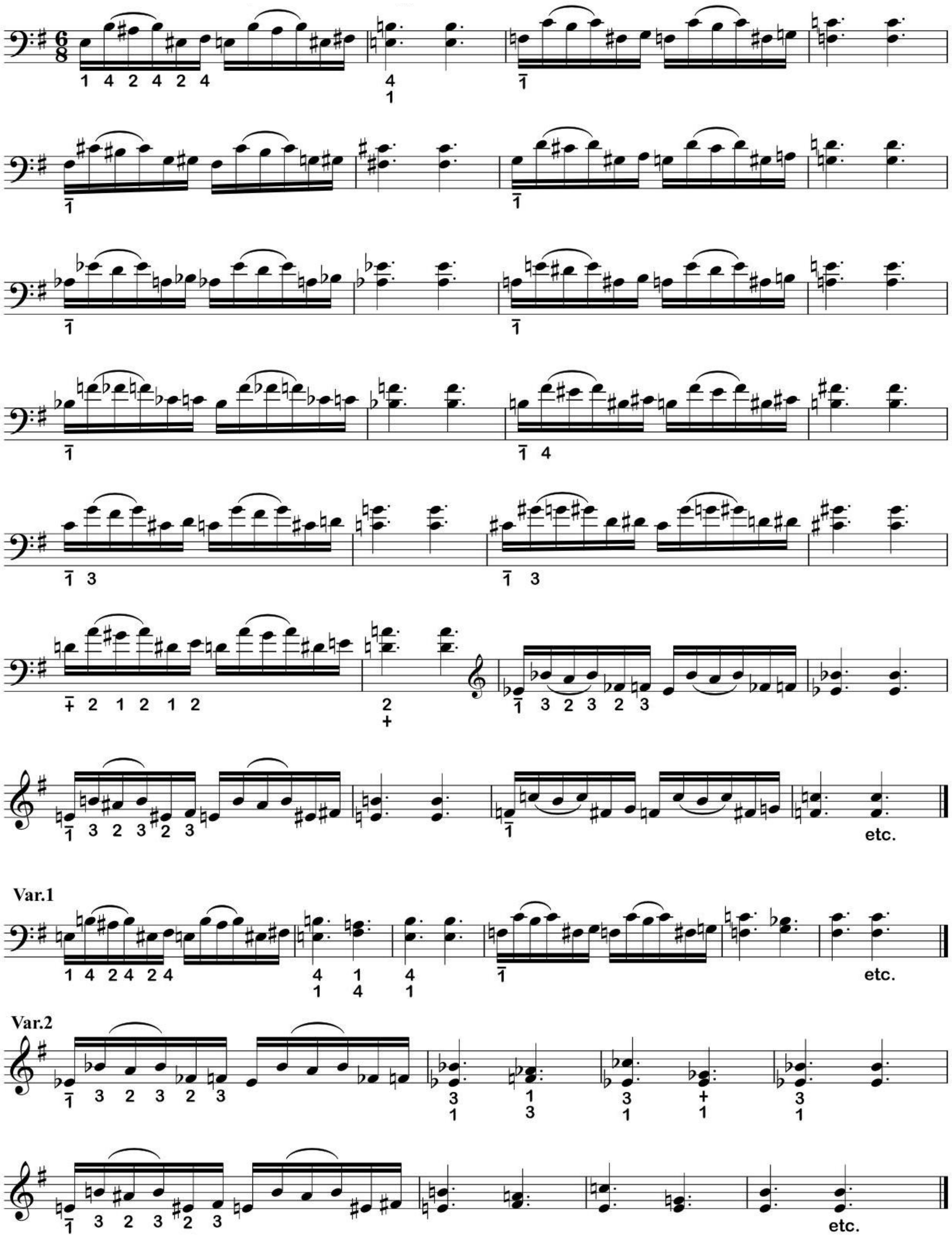


Exercise #7

Keep the 1st finger down and pay attention to the fingering around the break of the bass (the octave harmonic area). This is the best exercise for a balanced hand in double stops. Notice how much the elbow's positioning affects the intonation and comfort between fifths and thirds as in Variation 1.

Variation 2 is virtuoso level. Don't allow holes in the sound between the double stops.

Exercise #7 (cont.)

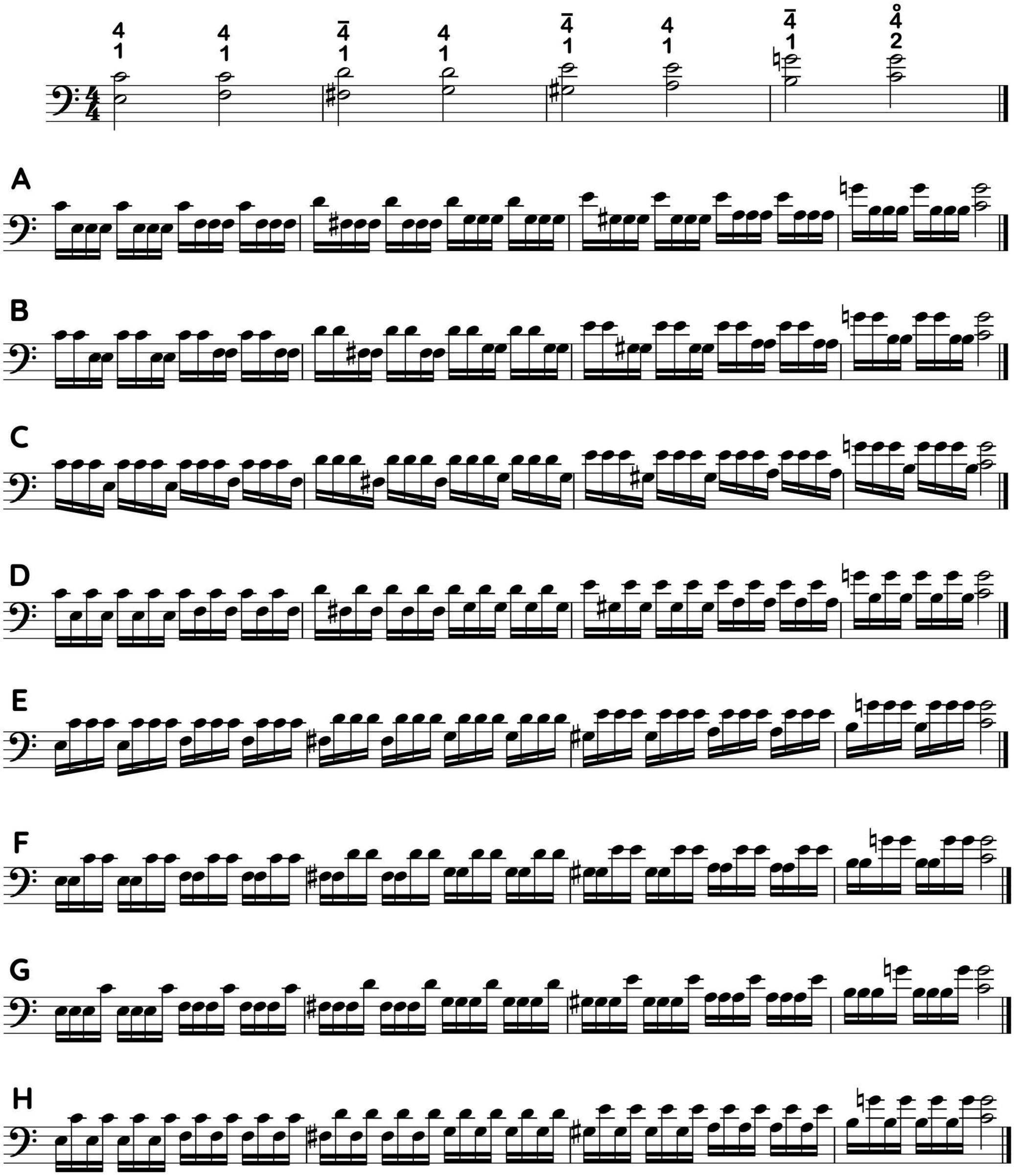


Exercise #8

This is a little diddle I made up to sort of condense the entire Zimmerman bow book into a 30 second Vivaldi-like tune. The ultimate objective is to improve the down-up motion from lower string to higher string as in the Mozart 40 excerpt starting with the Eb-major arpeggio, exemplified in example H (I don't like to turn the bowing backwards).

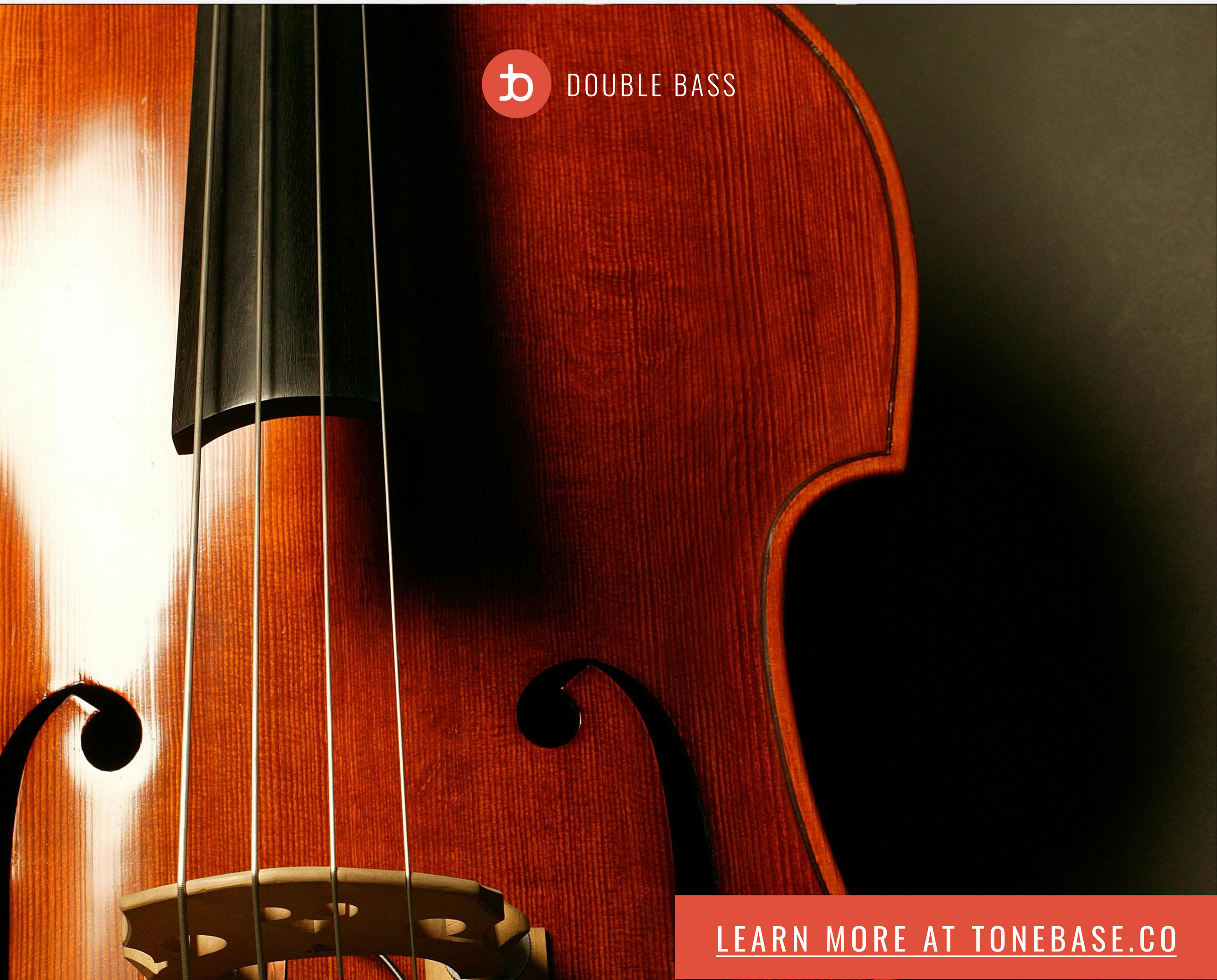
Practice these on the other pairs of strings as well. There is something great about the nice expansion/ contraction of the left hand that is a great warm up. If the minor-6th is too much of a stretch for your hand in first position, then start this in a higher position that is more comfortable for you.

Exercise #8 (cont.)



tonebase Double Bass – Coming Summer ‘24

We hope you have enjoyed this guide to warming up! Ready for more helpful bass resources?

Stay tuned for the release of tonebase Double Bass! Over the next few months, we’ll be sharing updates ahead of the launch including new artists added our roster, courses we’re filming, and more. Whether you play professionally or just for your own enjoyment, there’s going to be something for you on tonebase!

Feel free to write to team@tonebase.co with questions, comments, or corrections. We can’t wait to share with you all what we’ve been working on!