Valkyrie Studies

Exercises to assist with the preparation and performance of Richard Wagner's Ride of the Valkyrie

Michael Allen

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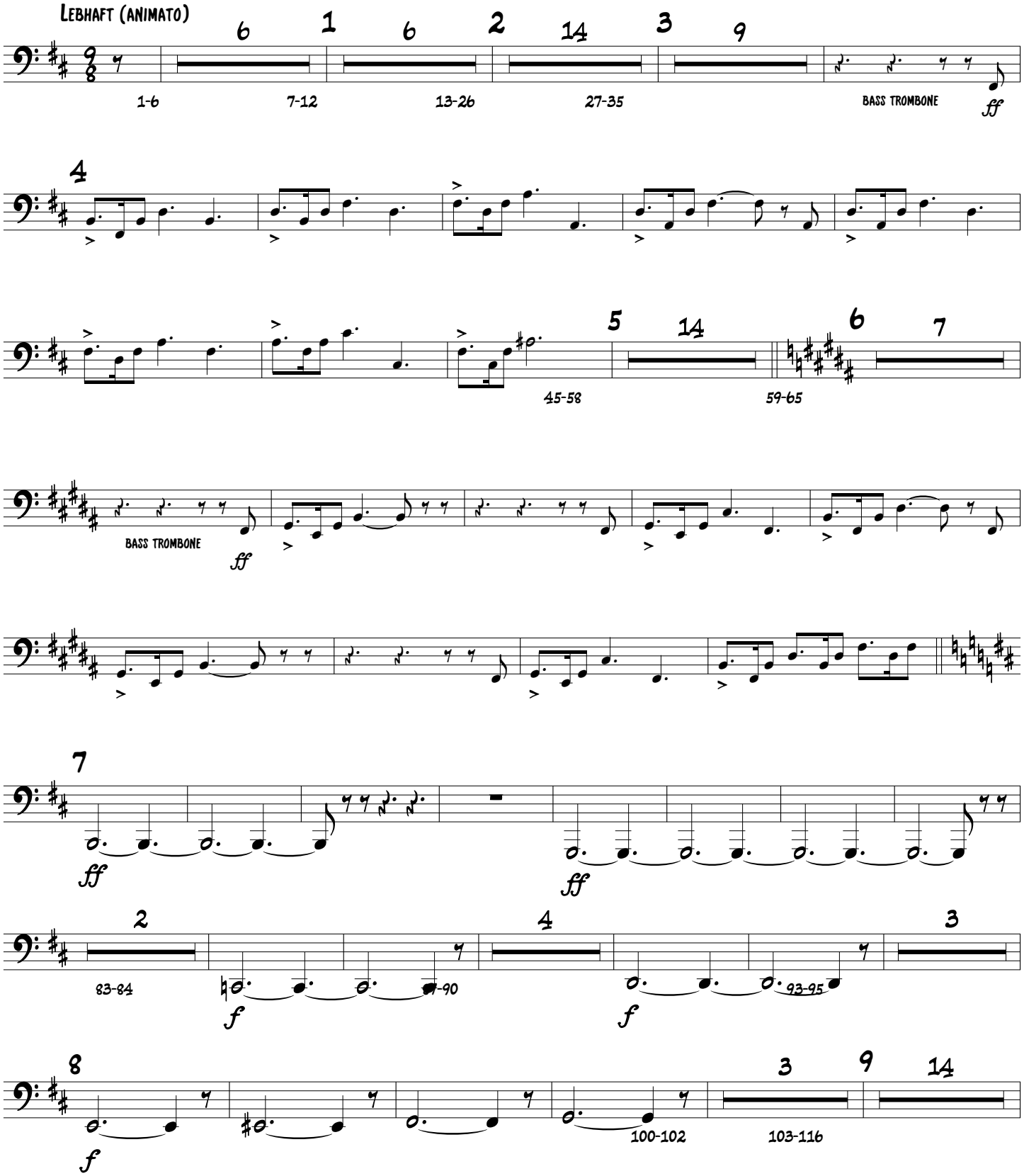
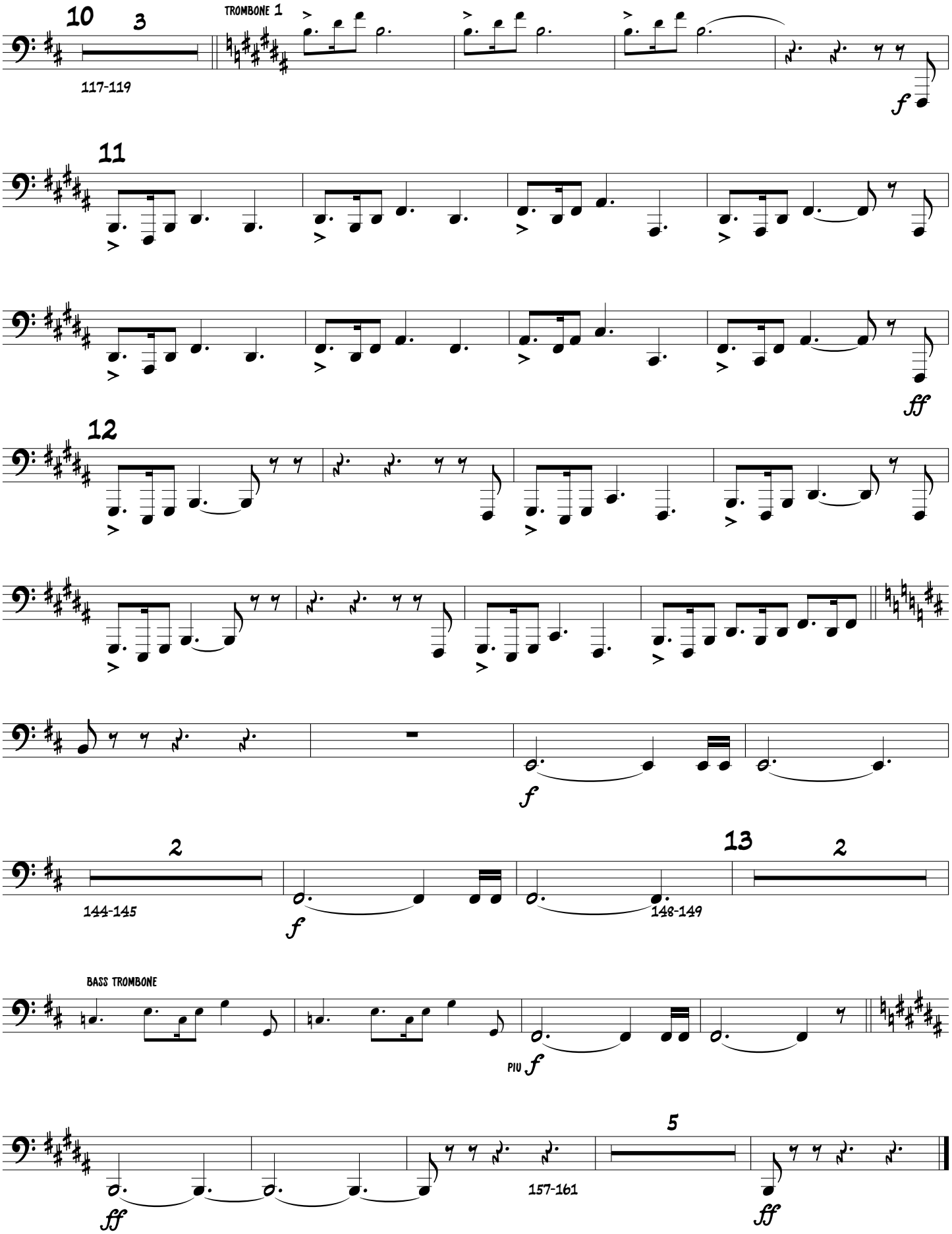
Richard Wagner

Ride of the Valkyries

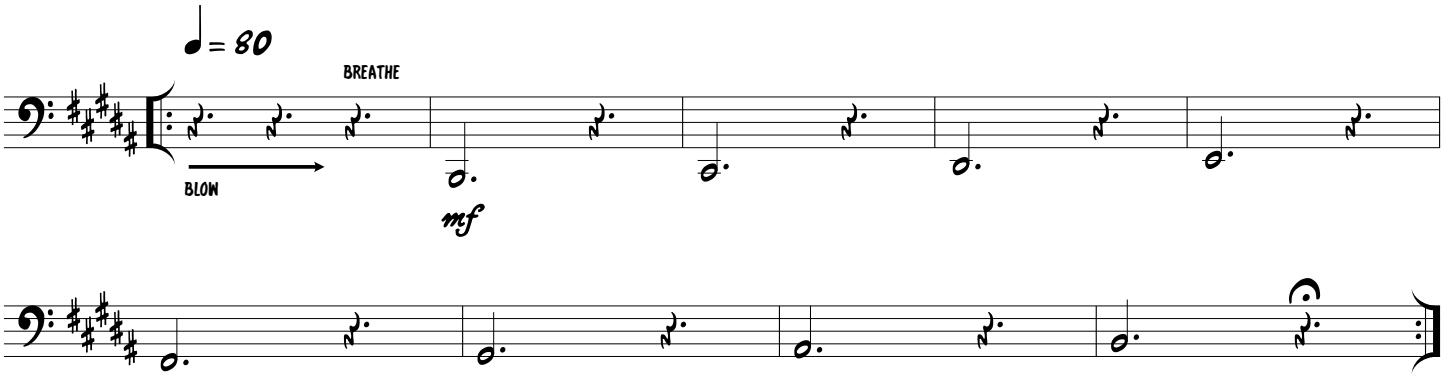



10
3
TROMBONE 1
117-119
f
11
124
128
ff
12
132
136
140
f
2
13
2
144-145
f
148-149
BASS TROMBONE
150
PIU f
154
5
157-161
ff
ff

At some point in your career, you **WILL** have the opportunity to perform "the Ride." If you are an aspiring orchestral tubist, you certainly will have to play this excerpt at an audition by yourself and likely, if you advance, with the trombone section or with the bass trombonist. If you are to win an audition, you must have a solid "Ride" (as well as many other things).

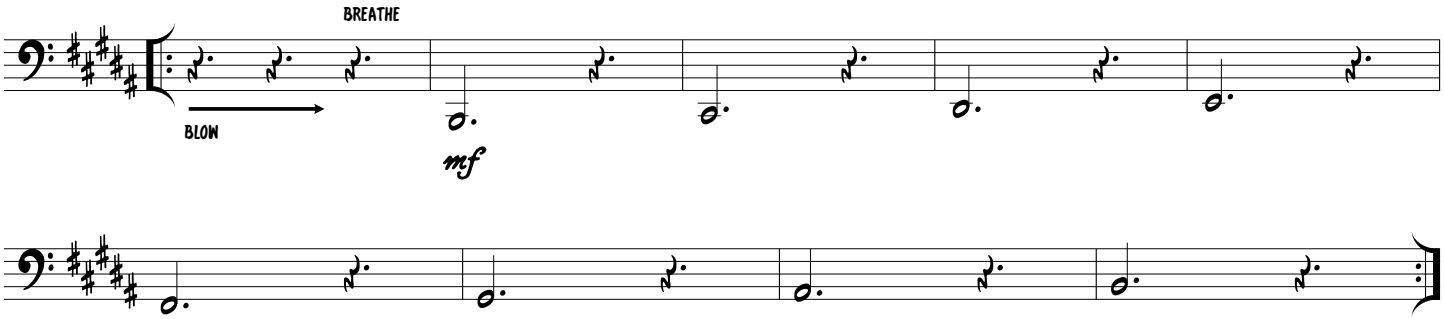
When preparing anything, your primary concern should be **MAKING AS MUCH MUSIC AS POSSIBLE**. Everything else is a means to this end. Three areas of study that will assist you with the primary concern are **TONE**, **PITCH** and **RHYTHM**. The excerpt from Ride of the Valkyries demonstrates these things about a tuba player or maybe a bigger concern, demonstrates when one or all of these are not really solid. It also demonstrates a tuba player's ability to control the instrument in the low register and when playing loud. **SO** - with metronome, tuner, recording device of your choice, and pencil close by - let's begin.

With your metronome on - in a relaxed fashion, blow all of your air out in an even stream over two counts (indicated as "blow"). Inhale (indicated as "breathe") over one solid count and play the scale. **DO NOT** look at your tuner the first couple of times through. Concentrate on even tone production, quality of attack, and your perception of intonation. Listen for the sound of an excellent B major scale. Practice hearing youself play - understand the difference between listening and hearing.

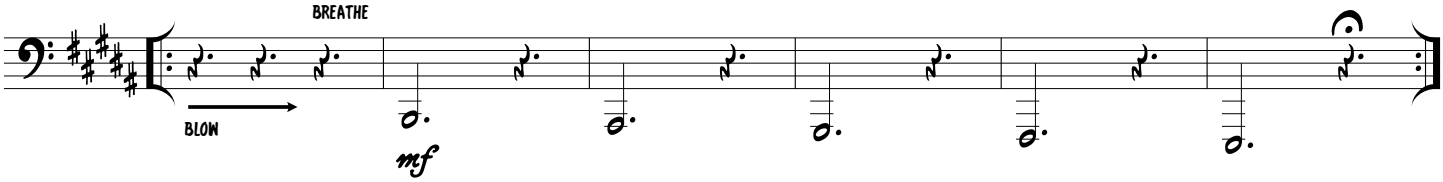


Repeat this exercise at piano, forte, pianissimo, and fortissimo listening for the same quality of sound and solid intonation. Remember when applying dynamics that these indications are not settings on a knob - they are a style and quality of sound. It is never okay to make a bad sound.

Now, with the tuner on - repeat the exercise above (mezzo forte first, then piano, forte, and so on). **DO NOT** zero out your pitches - observe your tendencies. Indicate above the pitch the approximate meter reading (or just an up or down arrow) for each pitch after playing the complete exercise. Work at making this aspect of your playing more solid - consistently and constantly.

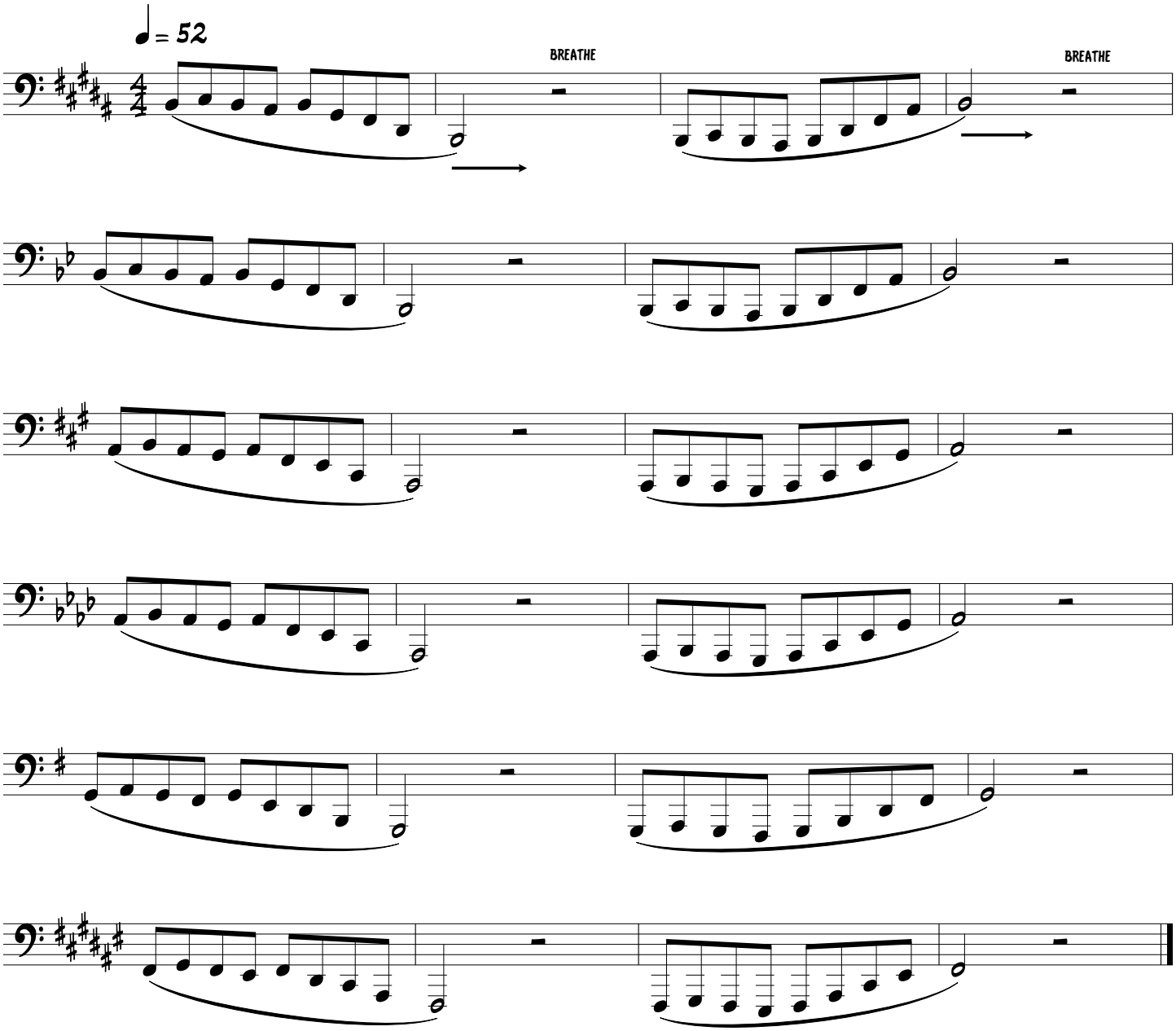


Repeat the previous steps in the low register.



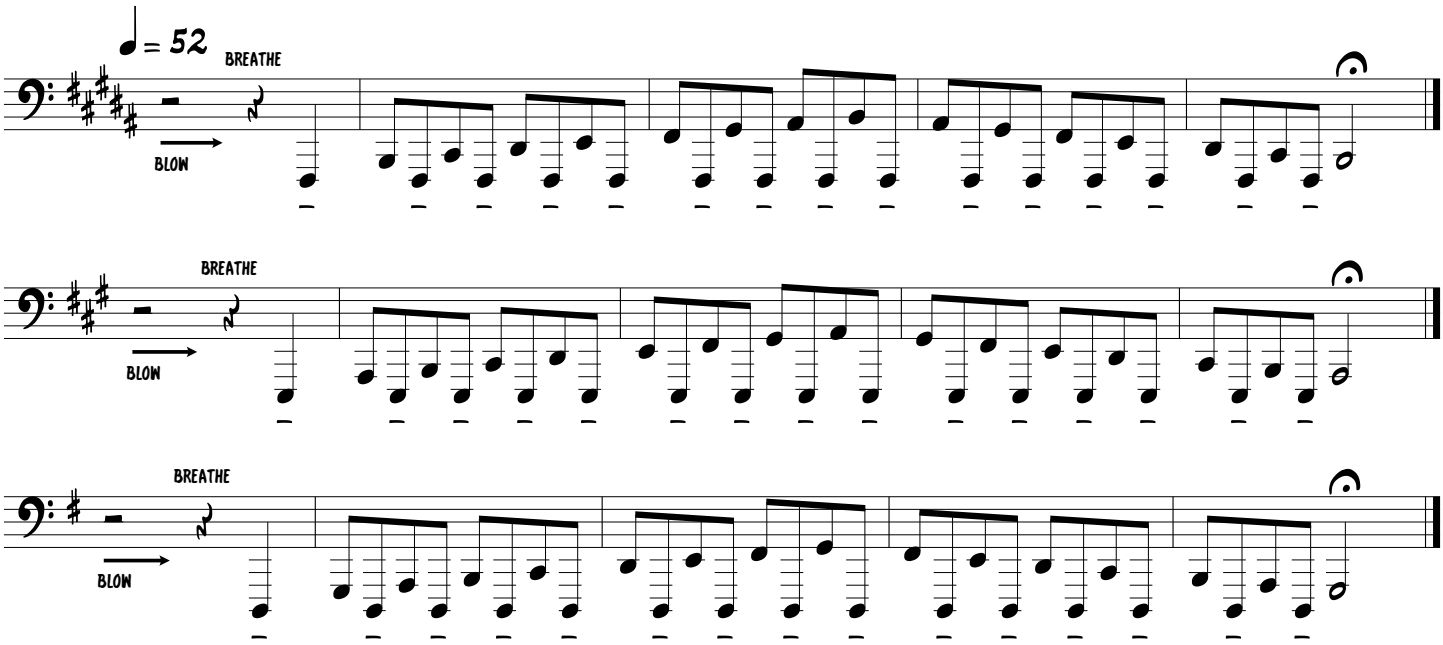
These flow studies (borrowed and modified from Mr. Jacobs' flow studies) should prove useful. Concentrate on blowing your air consistently through each phrase - great breath, attack tone, and release on each one. Make it a habit.

Metronome and tuner - spot check your pitches. It's not a bad idea to record these and listen back - do they sound solid and in tune?



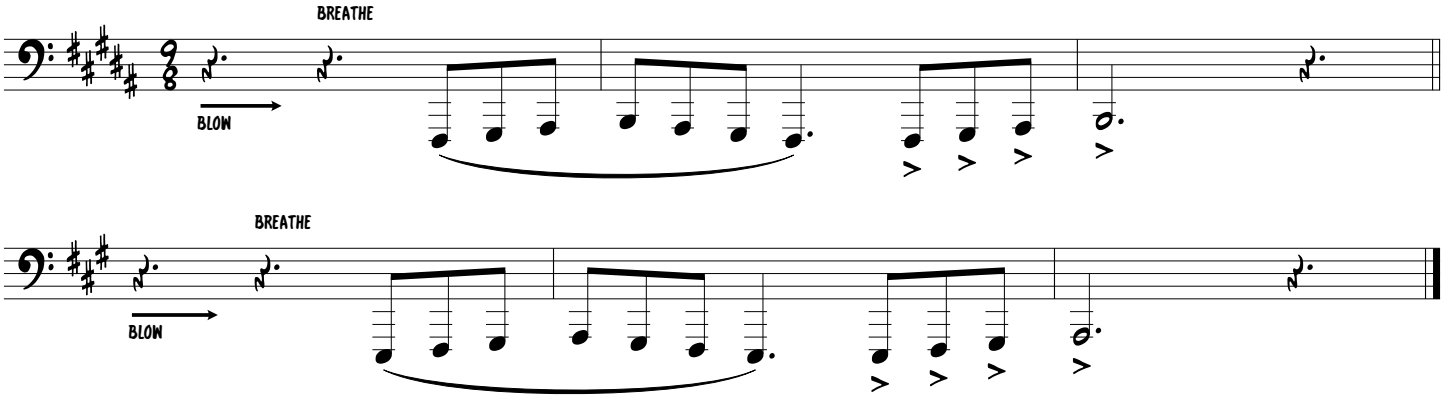
INTERVAL EXERCISES - these are modified Arban's exercises that I have found very useful in improving low register response and tone for many excerpts - these work especially well for the Ride, Fountains of Rome, and parts of Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5.

As before, concentrate on even tone production, response, quality of attack and intonation. Make certain that the bottom note (the one you return to after every scale pitch) is blown through and that you are really opening up your vowel sound when you go down to get that pitch. You should feel a pleasant, warm, and mild tingling sensation in the corners of your chops after finishing these exercises. You should also be a little light-headed. As Pat Sheridan would say, "embrace the horror."

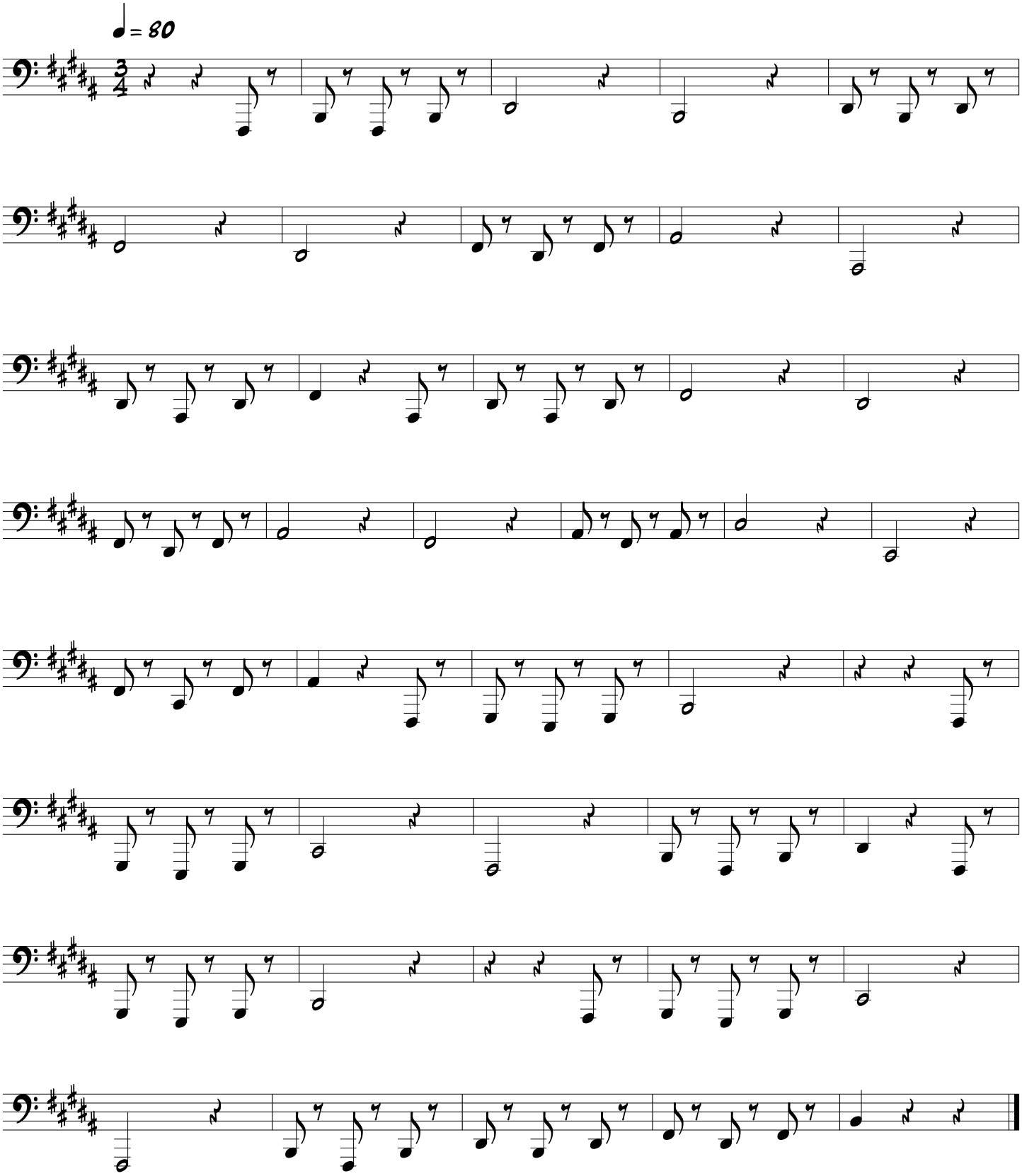


On these exercises, think weight (in your tone and air), response (clarity of articulation), and follow through - blow to and through the second beat of the second bar and to the third beat of the third bar. When you add the tongue, strive to keep you air the same. Play at mezzo forte, piano, forte, piannissimo, and fortissimo.

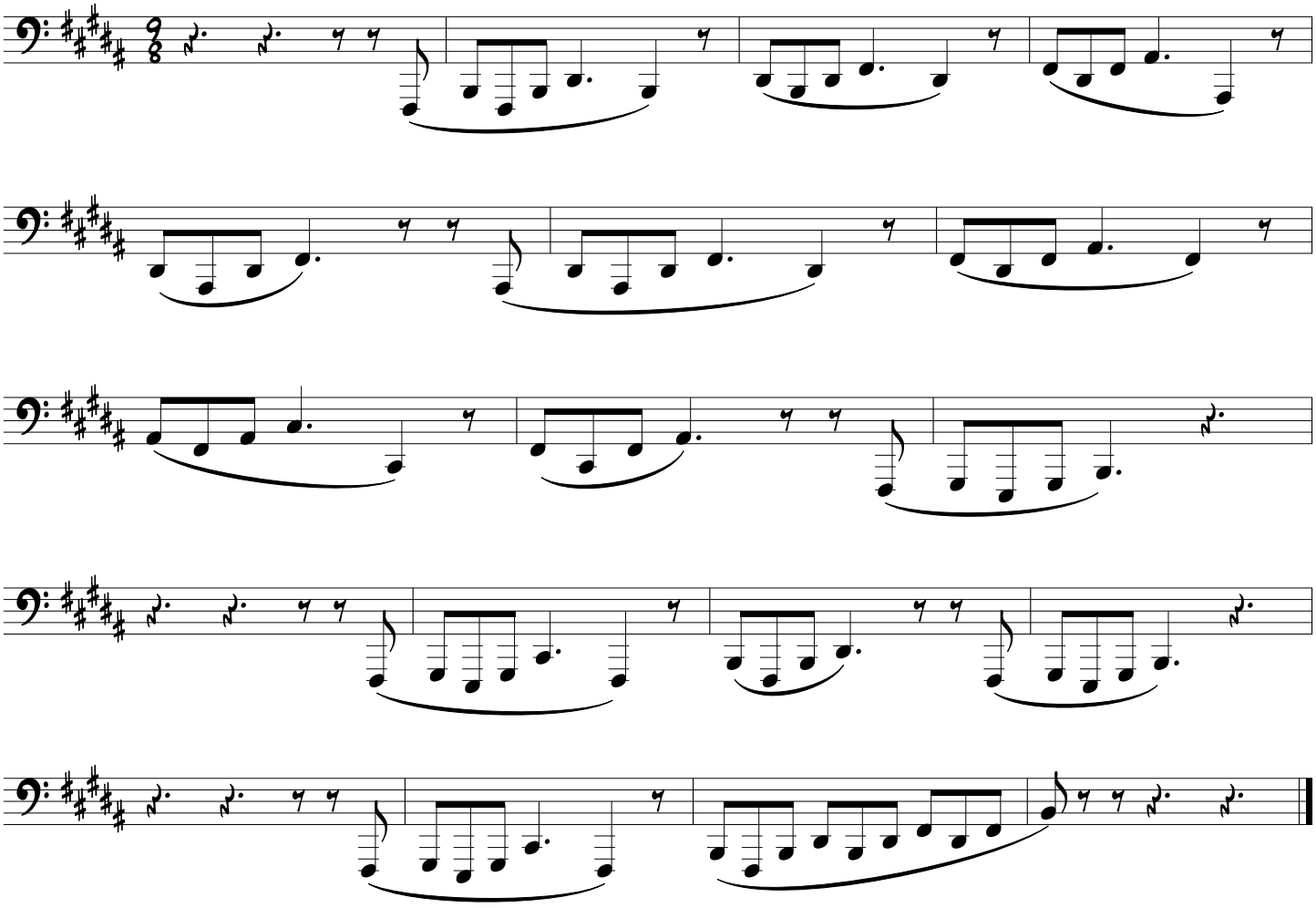
After a couple of successful passes - check your pitches (the F♯ & B, and the E &A). Do not zero out your pitches - check the tendencies and teach your ears to anticipate the correct intonation and tone.



This one will seem a little odd at first, but it will pay great dividends. During the rests, concentrate on the next note (attack, response, tone, pitch). This is a response exercise **AND** a concentration exercise. Play at mezzo forte, piano, forte, piannissimo, and fortissimo.

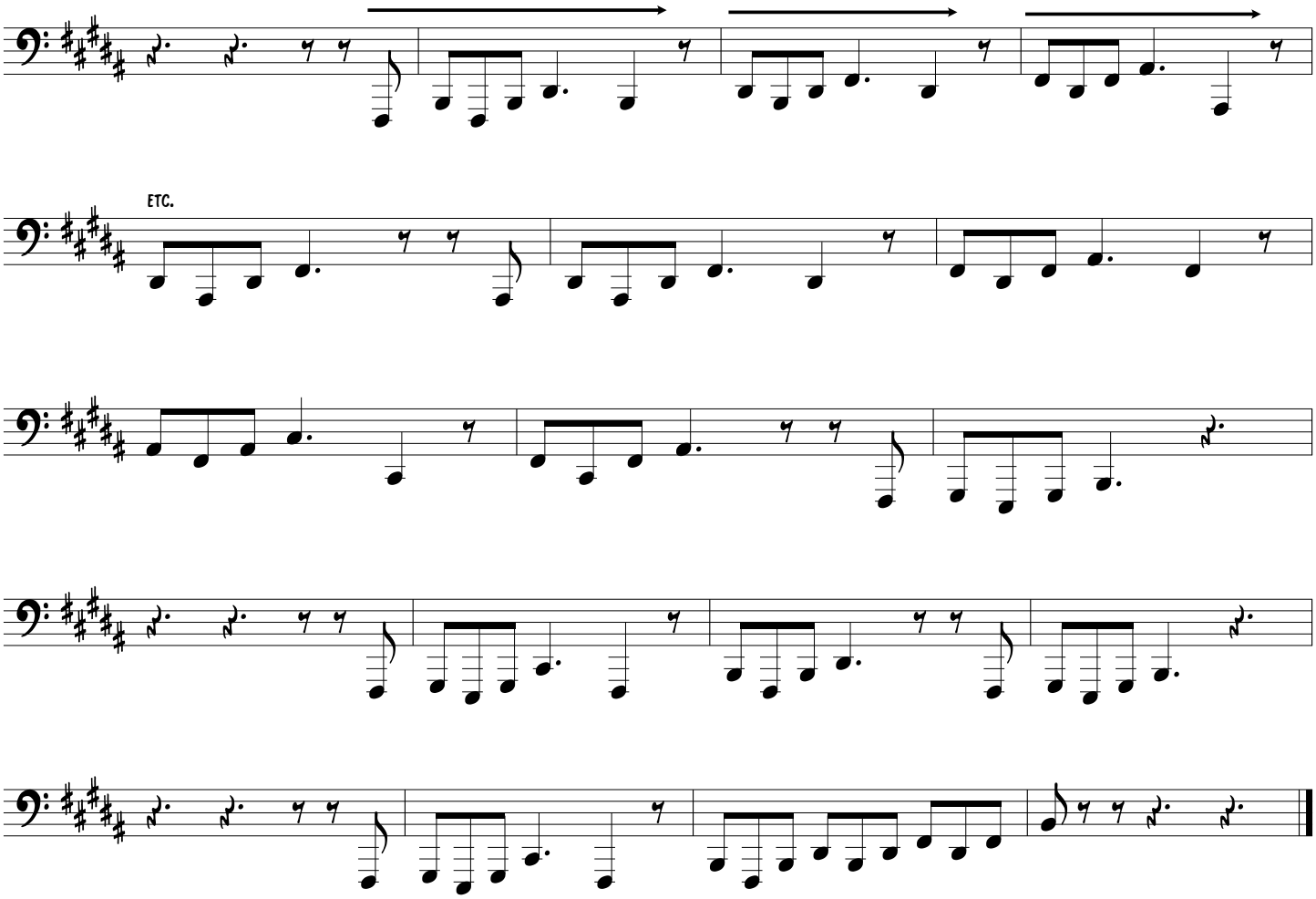


Applications - Play these like a Bordogni study - fill the slurs with as much tone as you can from attack to release. Follow through with your air. Play at mezzo forte, piano, forte, pianissimo, and fortissimo. Metronome on - always. Tuner on - spot check your pitches. Record this and listen for a solid tone production and any pitches that sound or feel out of place. Also listen for the quality of your air - a good sounding breath (quiet and resonant) is a good breath. Go down and get those low pitches!



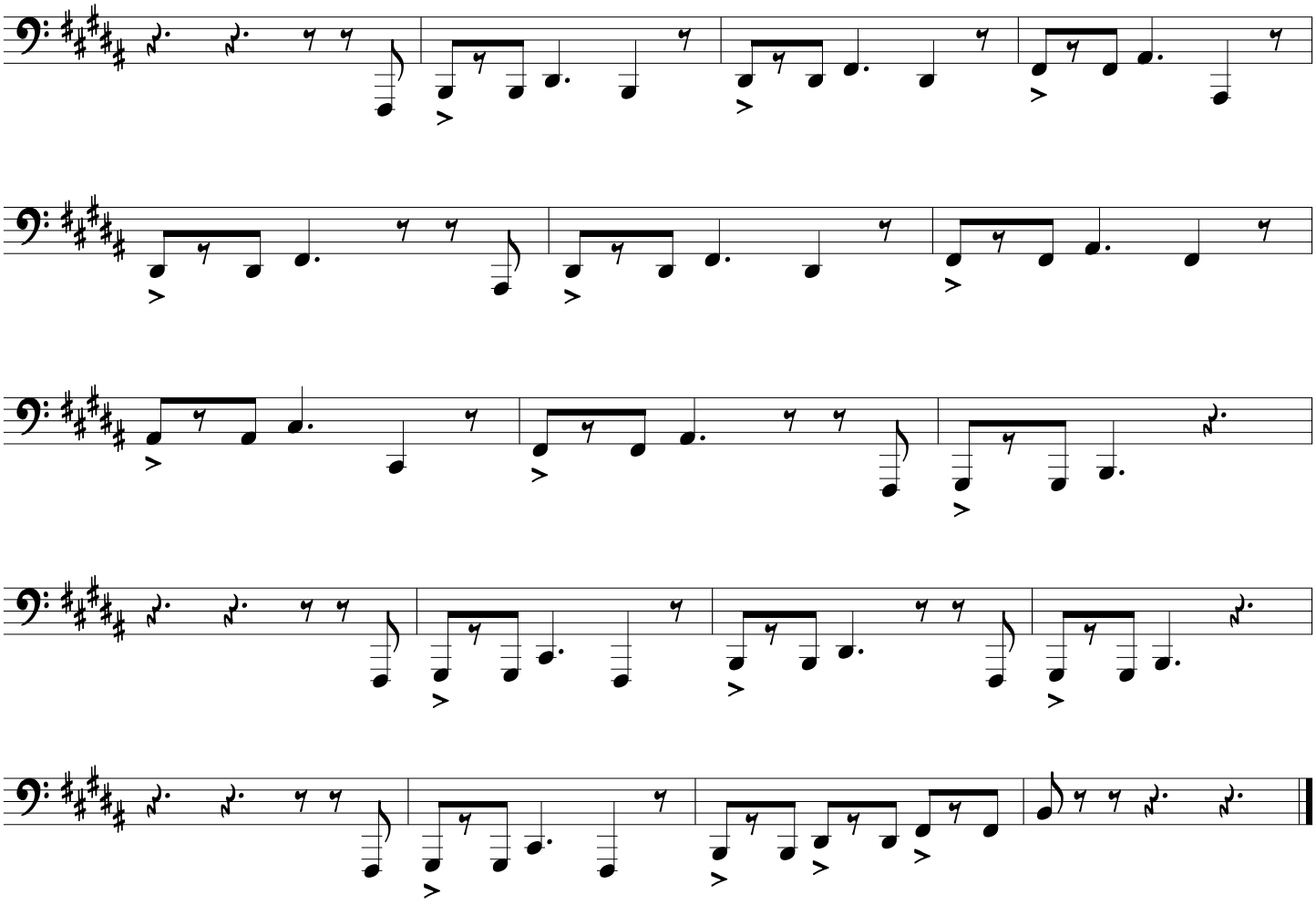
Now add your articulation. Make certain that you are blowing the same as before and add only enough tongue to add a subtle consonant sound to the front of the pitches. Keep the articulation simple. Focus on your air and your vowel sound. Record and listen.

Are you meeting your own expectations? Is it starting to sound like your favorite tuba player? If not, be patient and work harder. If so, raise the level of your expectation!



Concentrate on adding the accents - you should hear additional weight in the sound on the downbeats, not a harsher articulation. Do this with your air - not your tongue!

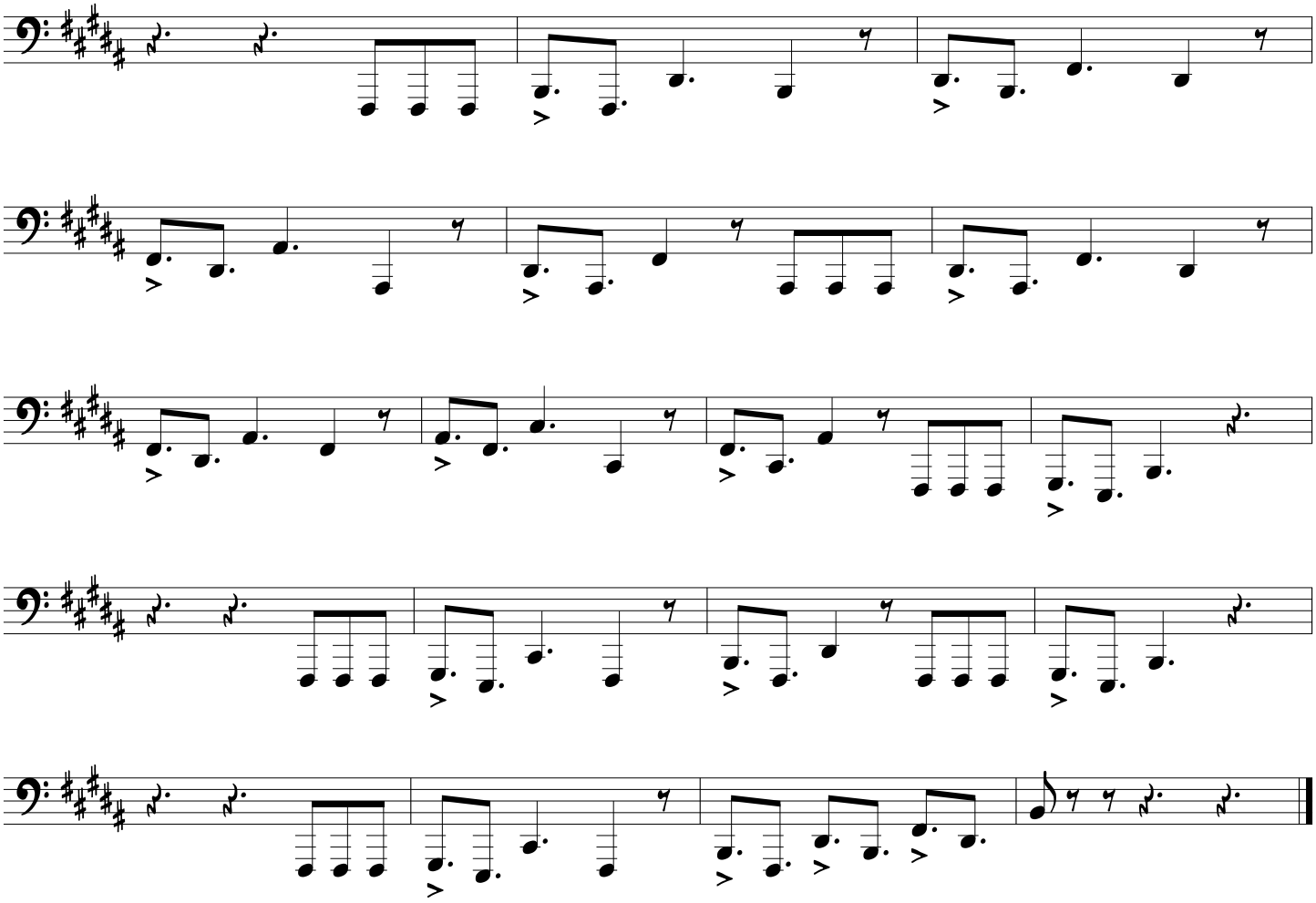
Also concentrate on the placement of the third eight note on each beat (particularly the very first one!)



Placement of the sixteenth note.

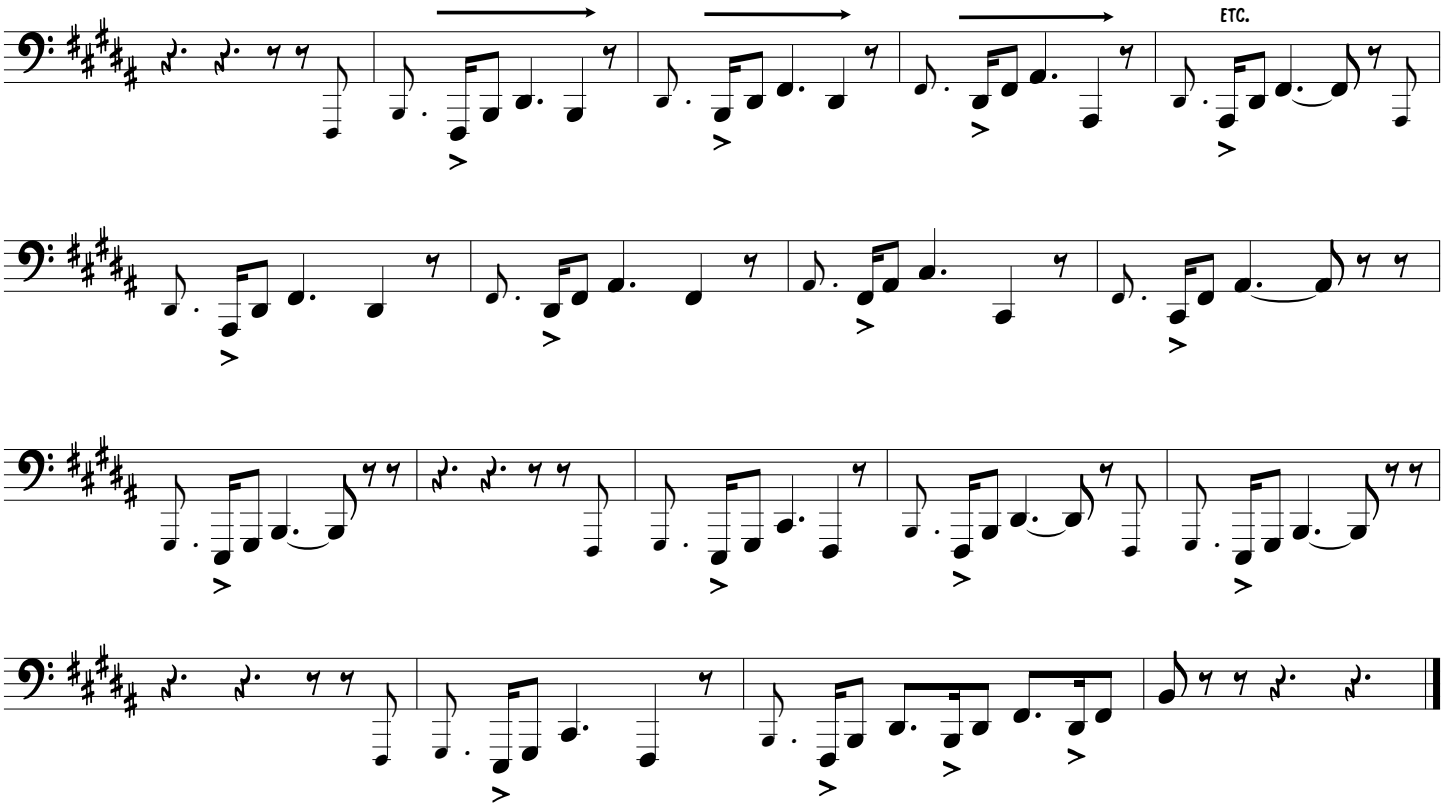
Make sure there is plenty of weight on the lower dotted eighth note.

The additional eighth notes on the pick up beats are there to preserve the integrity of the triplet feel on beat 3. The poor placement of the pickup eighth note is the pet peeve of many who sit on audition committees.

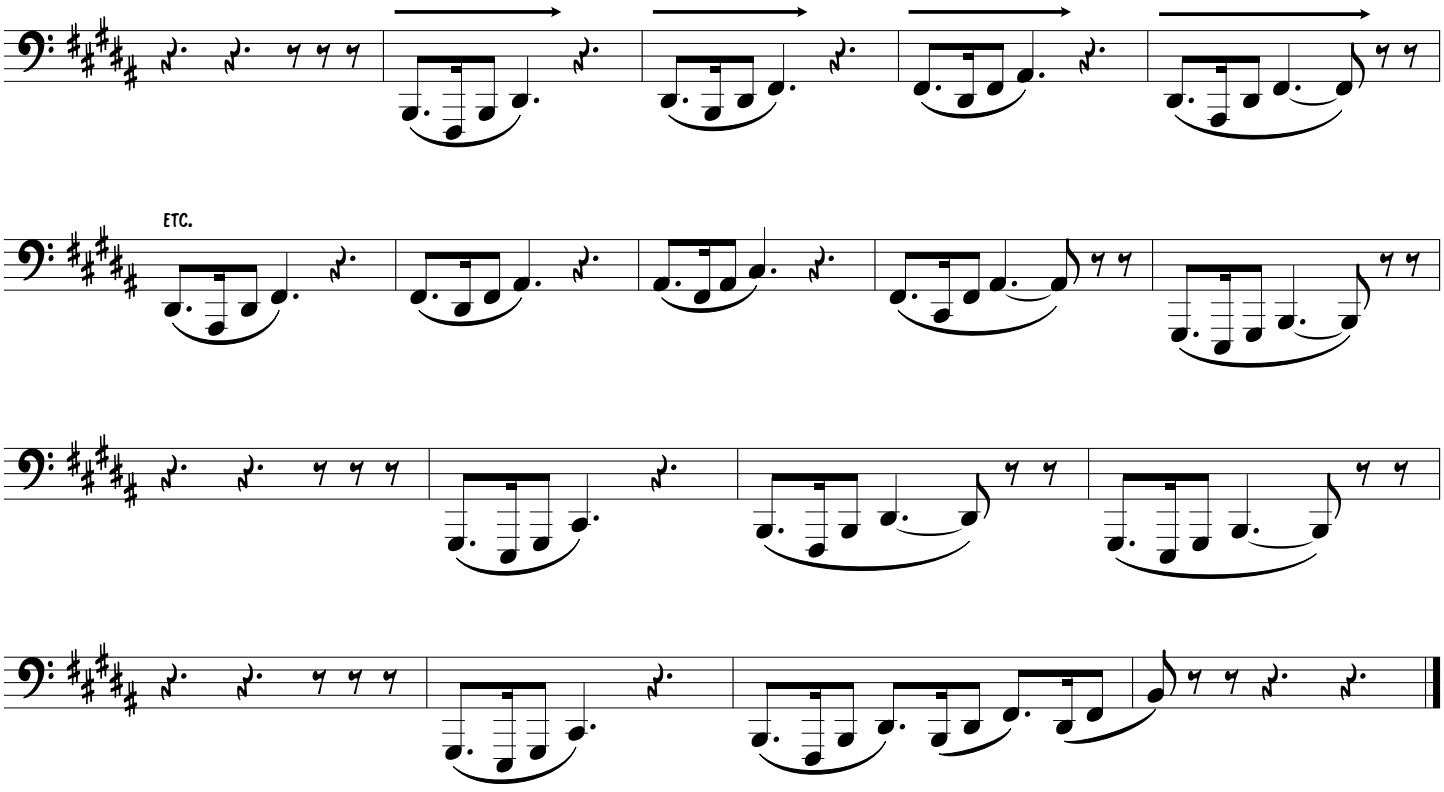


Misplaced Accents - really dig into the low pitch - "visualize" (or is it auralize?) the small missing pitches.

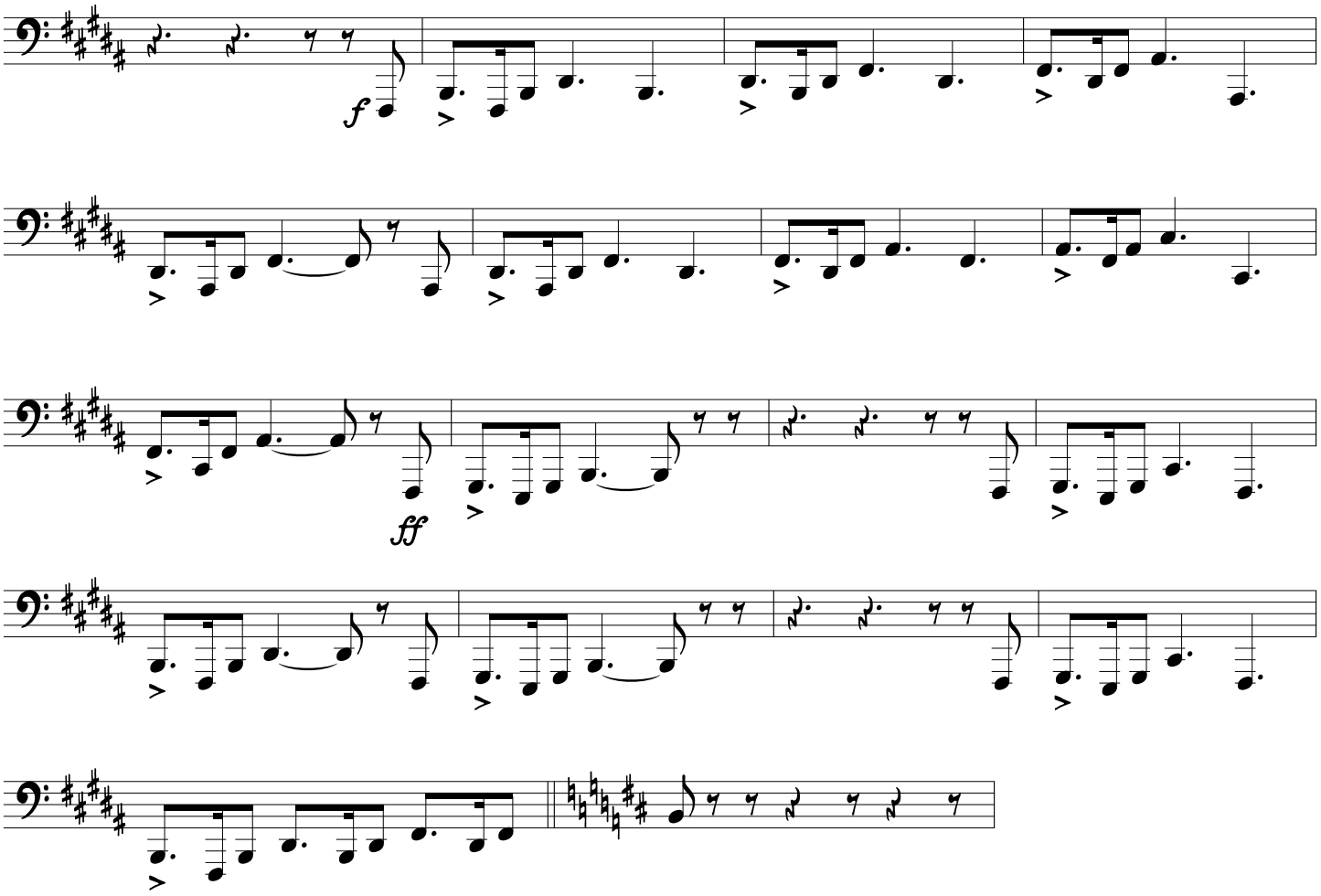
Play at mezzo forte, piano, forte, pianissimo, and fortissimo. Record, listen, observe, correct. Expect and anticipate.



Make the sound thick on every note - no thin spots. Play at All dynamics - record, listen, observe, correct.



Finally, the excerpt:



I encourage you to expand on these exercises to exploit the weaknesses in your own playing. I have used all of these exercises in my quest to become more consistent when I play the Ride - there are many more variations you can apply to make this excerpt more consistent for you.

As with all excerpts - it is vital that you do the score study and follow along with recordings. You should listen to as many recordings as you can and add the styles of various orchestras and low brass sections to your vocabulary.

NOTES: