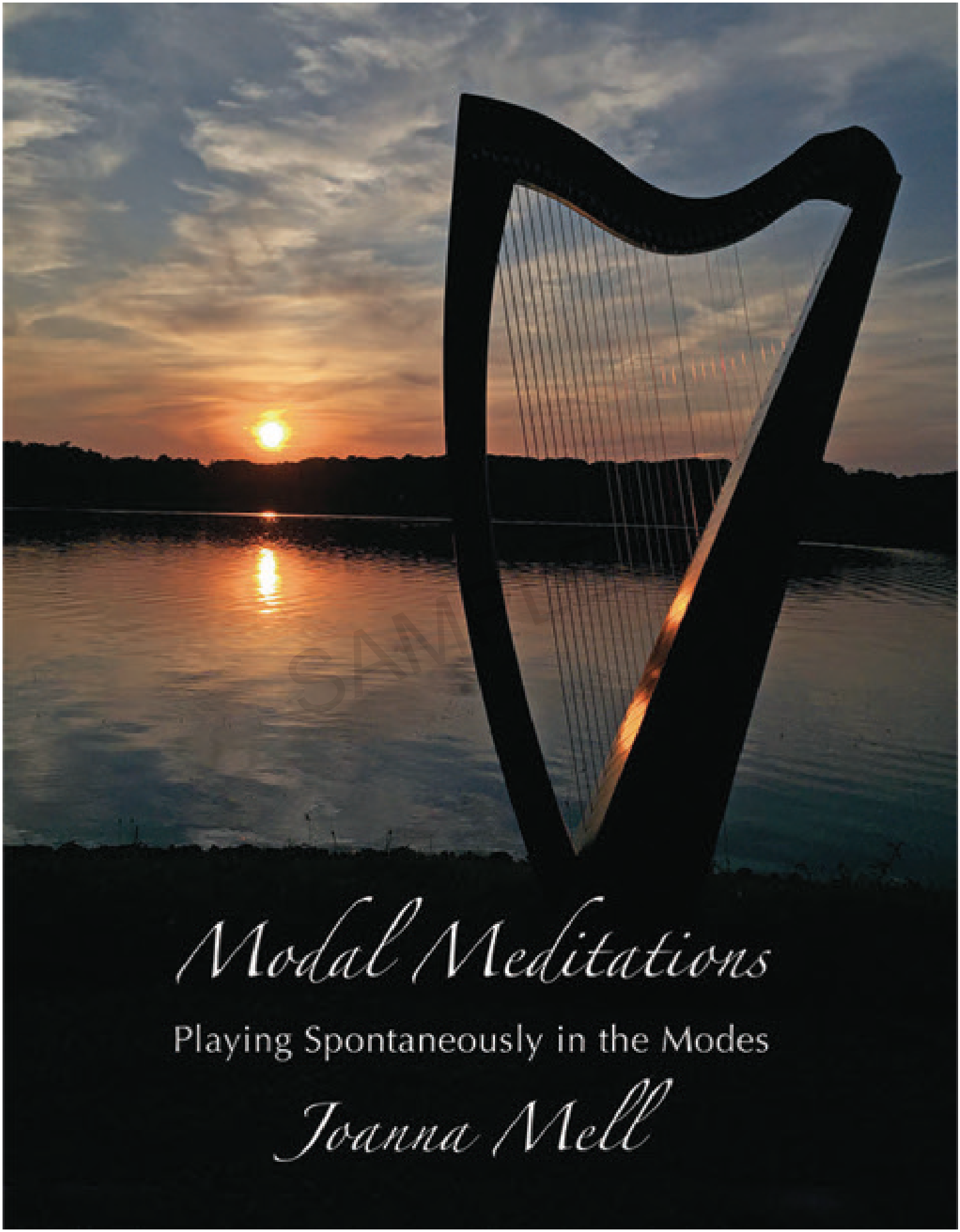
Modal Meditations
Playing Spontaneously in the Modes
Joanna Mell

Modal Meditations

This book is a sequel to "Modal Musings: Modes & Music", which outlines and analyzes each of the seven contemporary modes. I highly recommend that you become very familiar with the material in "Modal Musings" before embarking on the material in this book. A working knowledge of the modes and music theory is helpful to understanding and using the material in this book. The intent of this book is to provide a variety of arpeggios and musical phrases to enhance the musician's repertoire for spontaneous composition. I hope that these offerings will inspire the reader in spontaneous playing and give rise to new compositions of the reader's own making.

The modes provide the musician with a varied palette of harmonies and tonal colors with which to create compositions with unique musical moods and atmospheres. The modes consist of collections of pitches which form scales. The Ionian mode is familiar to musicians as the modern major scale, and the Aeolian mode is familiar as the modern natural minor scale. The rest of the modes (Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian and Locrian) are familiar to the modern Western musician as altered major and minor scales.

Each mode consists of seven notes. It is of utmost importance to understand that these notes do not exist in a vacuum. Each note has a relationship with the note that is the tonal center of the mode, creating a harmonic interval. Each note also may form a harmonic interval with another note in the modal scale, especially when played as a chord. These harmonic intervals determine the identity, nature, and characteristics of each mode. Chord progressions are very helpful in creating the "modal atmosphere" because they establish a framework in which the mode is experienced by the listener. Therefore, it is essential that the musician understands and becomes familiar with the harmonies created in each mode. To this end, I have included many examples of chord progressions and musical phrases for each mode in the book. I highly recommend that the reader become familiar with and memorize these patterns so that a repertoire is created that will become a great resource in spontaneous playing and composition.

When using this book, I suggest playing through the chord progressions using block chords at first, and then playing the chords in arpeggio patterns, both in 3/4 time and 4/4 time. The variations on the arpeggio patterns are endless, and only a few are included here. I encourage the musician to experiment with the patterns, rearranging notes, adding some passing and neighbor tones, and generally being as creative as possible. For the therapeutic musician, the use of arpeggios is valuable, as they can be used in harmonic patterns to soothe, calm, and uplift. In this way, musical compositions unfamiliar to the patient can be created.

I hope the material in this book inspires you in your new musical journeys.

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Playing Spontaneously in the Modes

Music is a gift that has been given to all of us by our Creator. It lives deep inside each person's soul and spirit - it cannot be manufactured. Some people have a greater gift for creating new musical compositions than others; however, the gift can be cultivated, nurtured, and strengthened. Creating spontaneous musical compositions comes very naturally to small children. Children enjoy making up games on the playground and these are often accompanied by rhymes and tunes. Children naturally absorb the music of the culture that is all around them. They use these learned patterns and musical frameworks to create their own songs. Unfortunately, as people age chronologically, this gift is pushed aside and too often becomes buried and neglected as society creates pressure to excel in other areas. The gift is always there, however, just as water flows underground without our awareness of it. This resource often bubbles up spontaneously as a spring; at other times, we must dig deep wells and work harder at bringing it to the surface.

In my own experience as a creative musician, I have found that the gift for spontaneous composition has been nurtured by the many songs and pieces that I have learned over the years. I have learned musical patterns in my studies of folk music and classical music, and these patterns form the basis for spontaneous composition. Therefore, I am including many of these patterns in this book and sharing them with you, the reader, to give you a repertoire of musical phrases and patterns to form a framework upon which you may weave your own spontaneous compositions. Most musical compositions consist of chord patterns and melodies built upon short scales and chord tones and the greater our repertoire is, the deeper the reservoir will be when we wish to create our own compositions.

I suggest that you start with the easier patterns and commit them to memory (get them "by heart") and then move on to learn the more advanced patterns and phrases. Eventually, you will start playing some of these patterns and a new pattern will come into your fingers. There are no strict rules when it comes to playing spontaneously. However, it is helpful when one can start with a framework of a chord progression, much as the weaver sets up the loom before starting to weave the piece. I like to think of the process as a plane taxiing down a runway, gradually picking up speed, and then lifting off the ground to soar in the air. The musical phrases and patterns in the musician's subconscious can provide wings to soar.

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Aeolian Meditation

Aeolian
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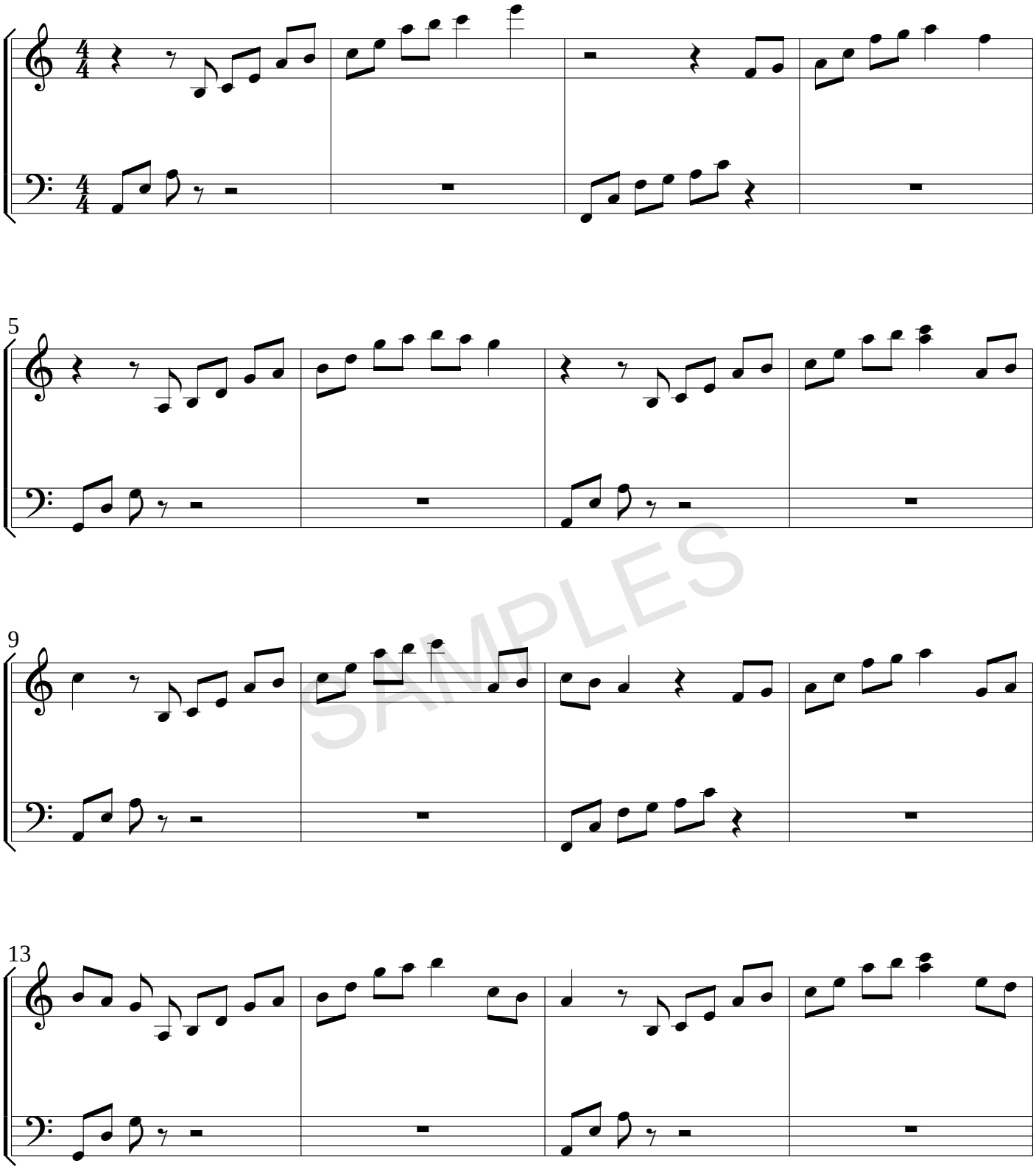

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Dorian

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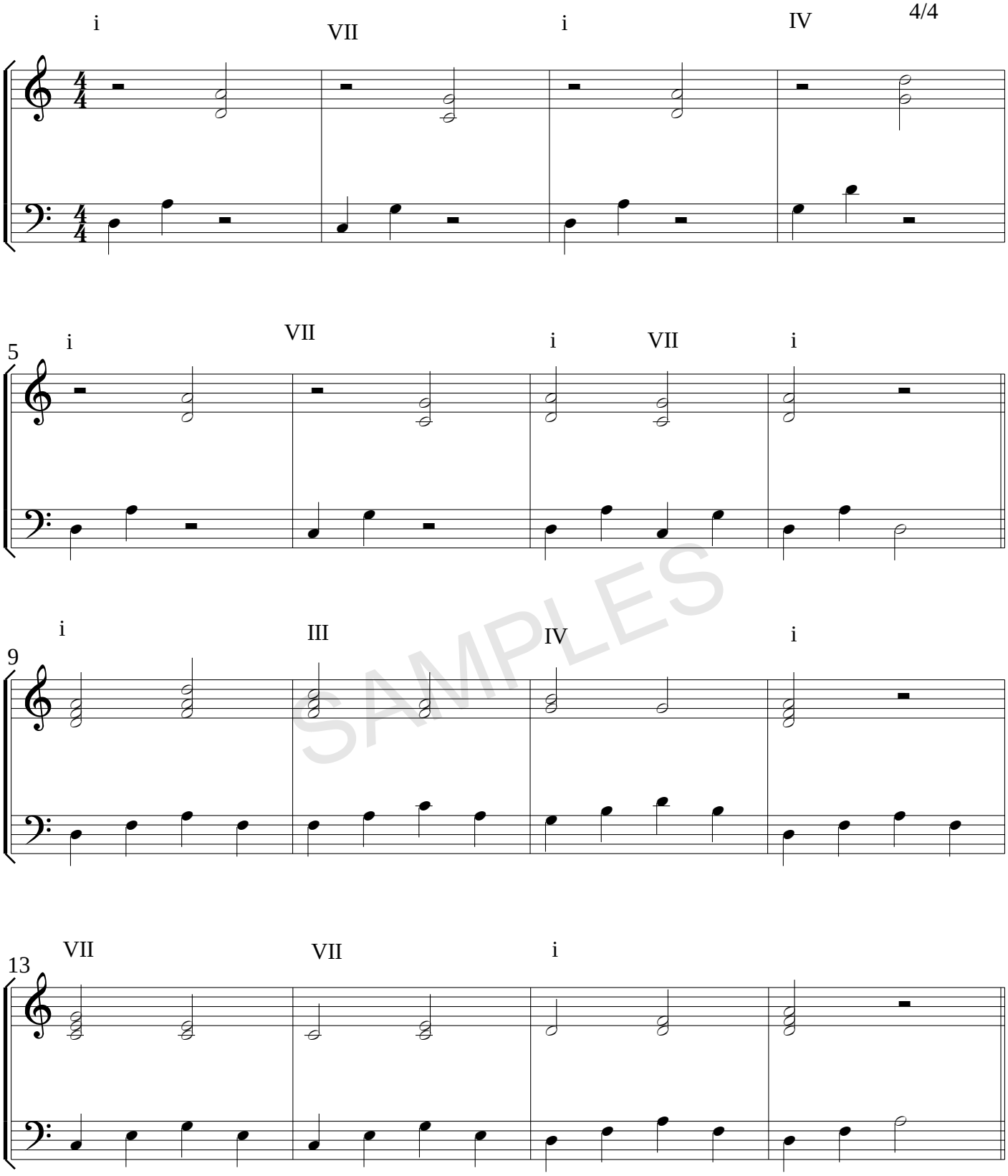

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Dorian
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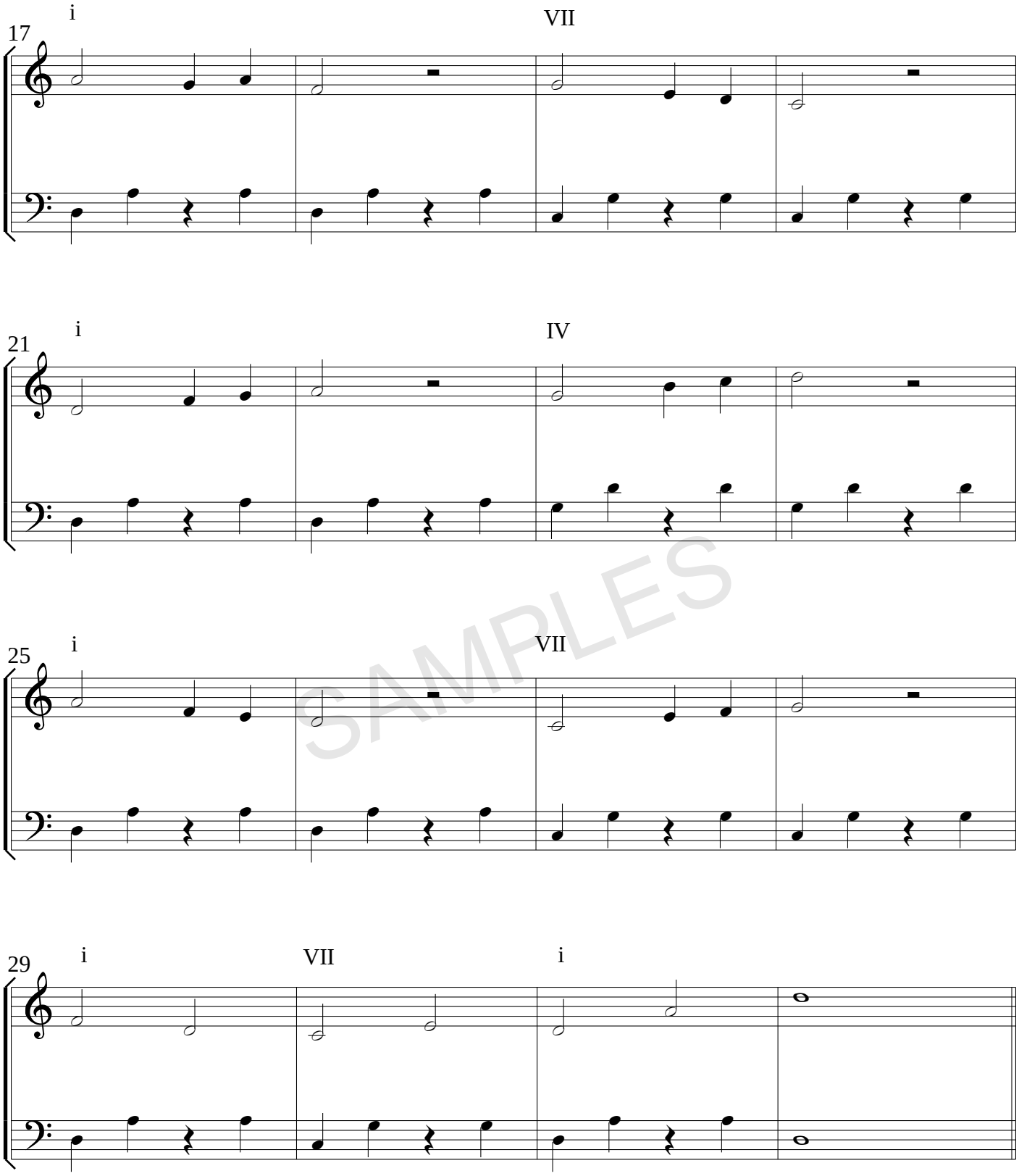

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Dorian
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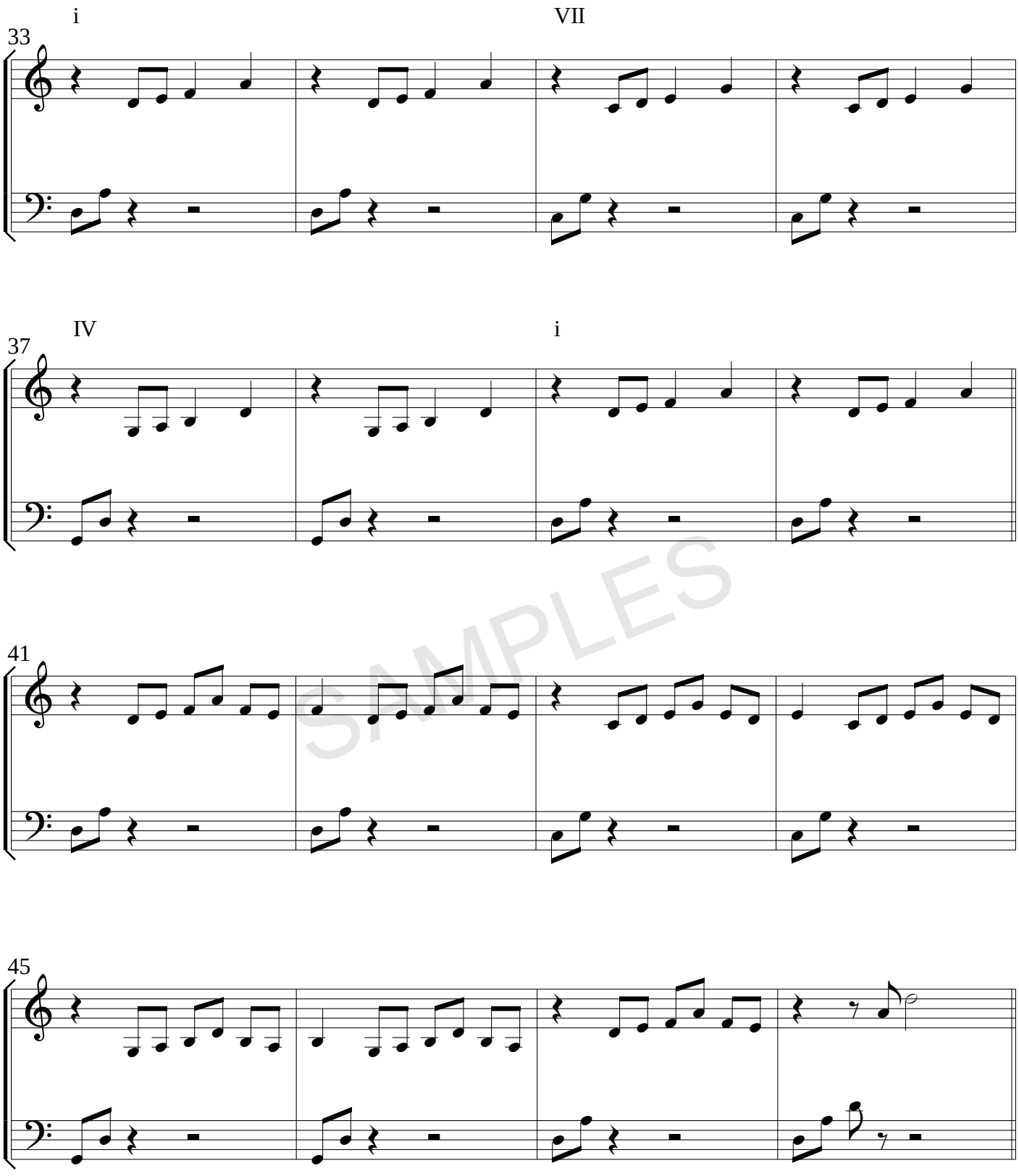

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Ionian

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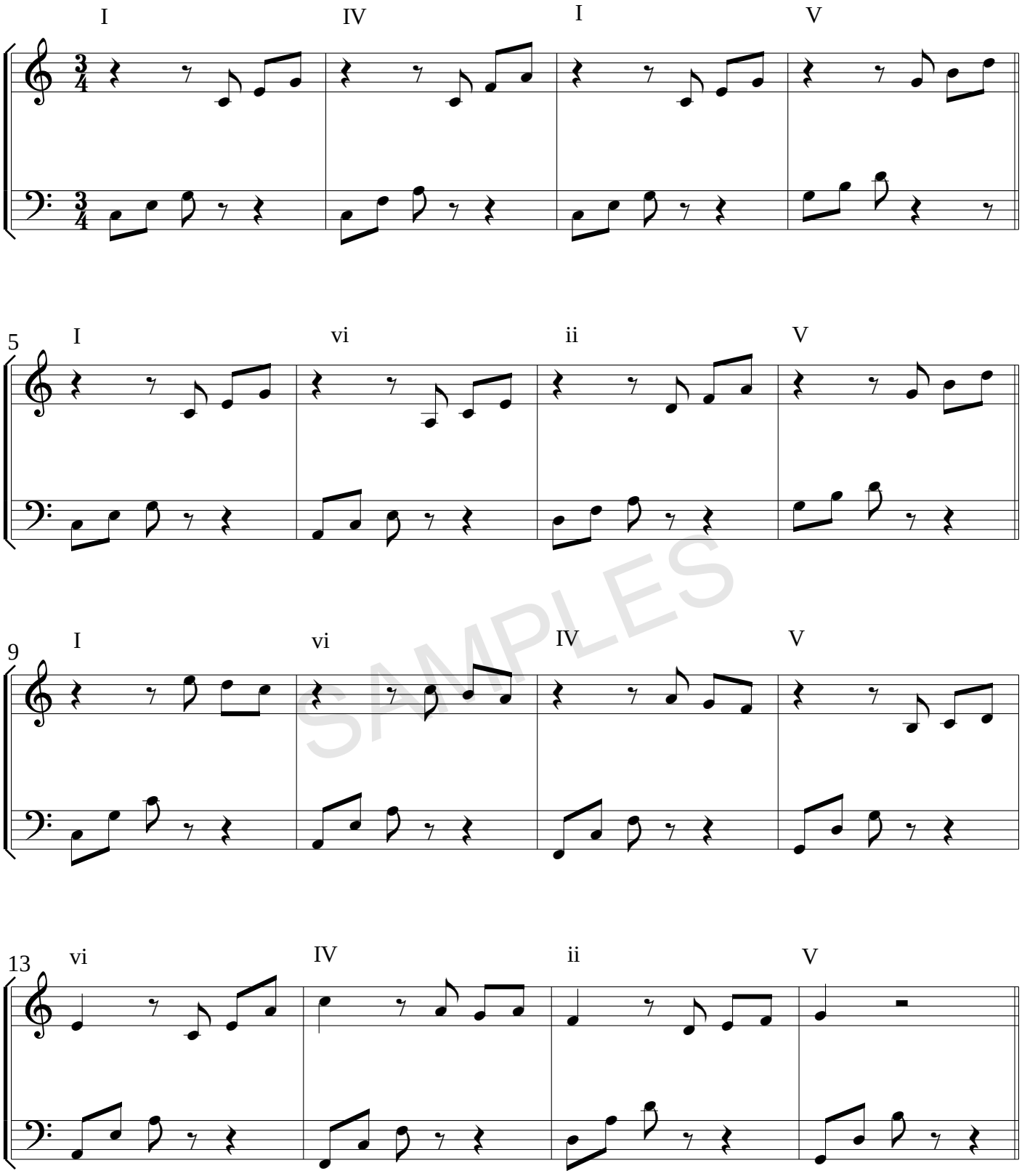

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Lydian
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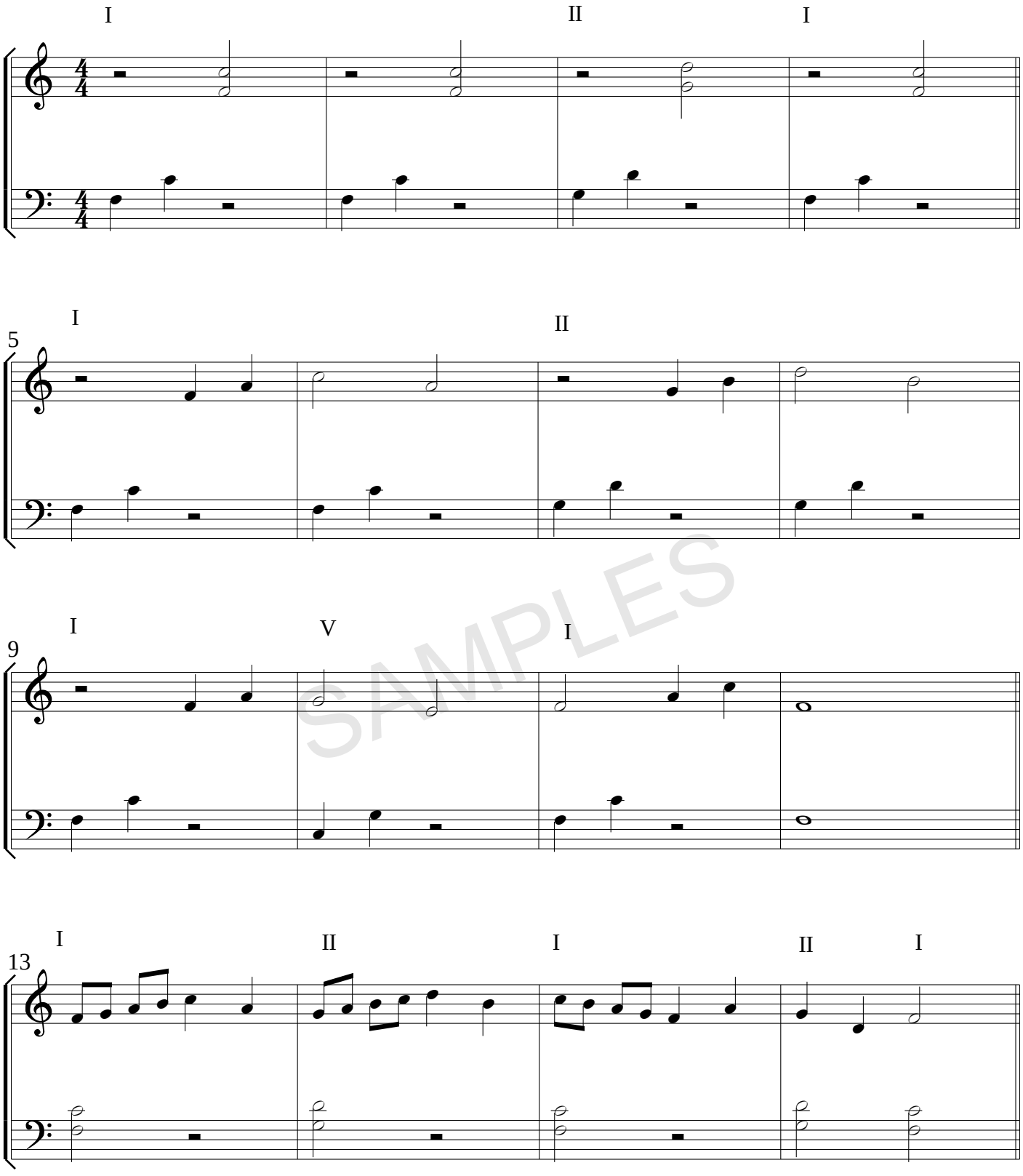

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Mixolydian Meditation

Mixolydian
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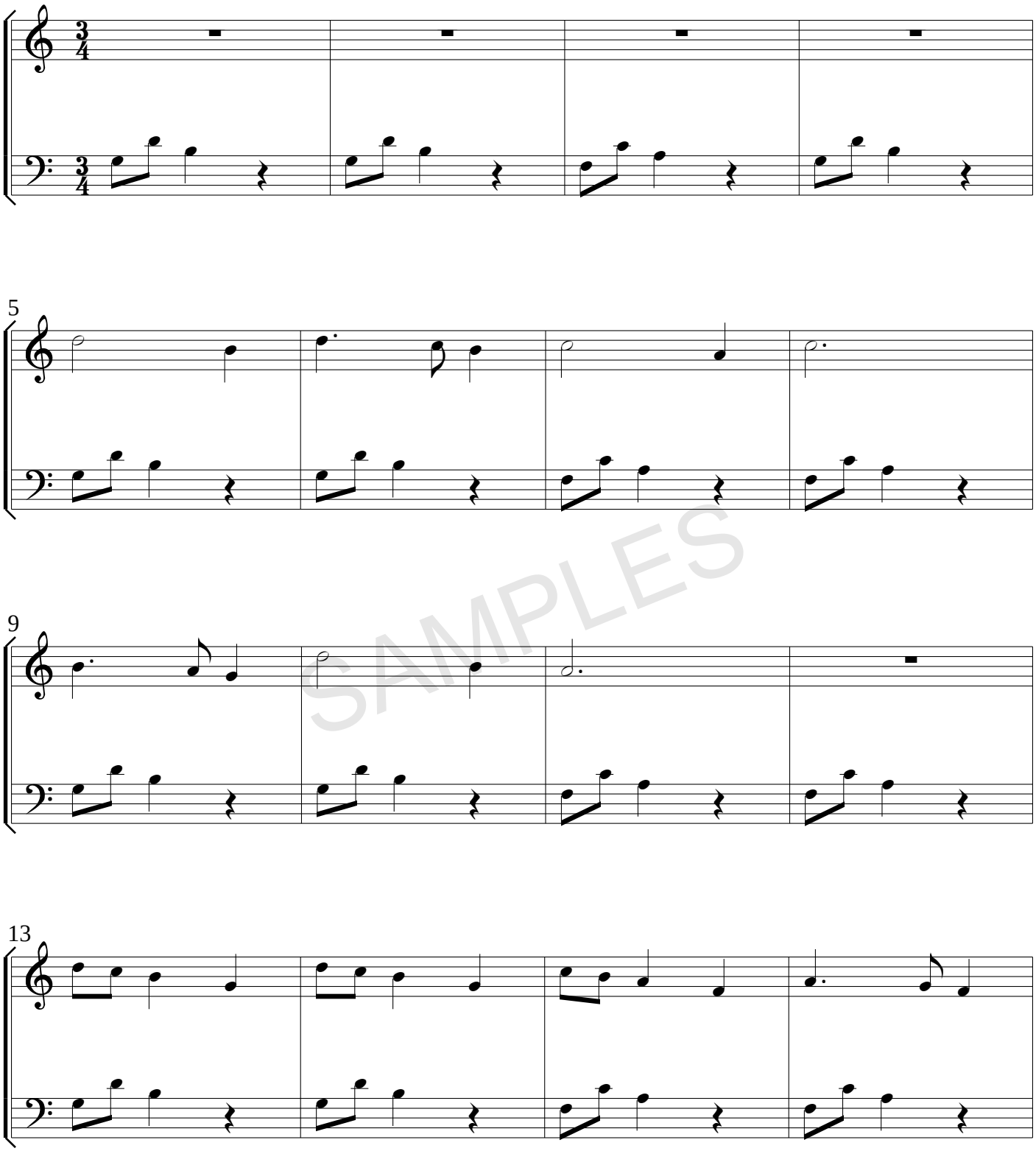

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Phrygian Meditation

Phrygian
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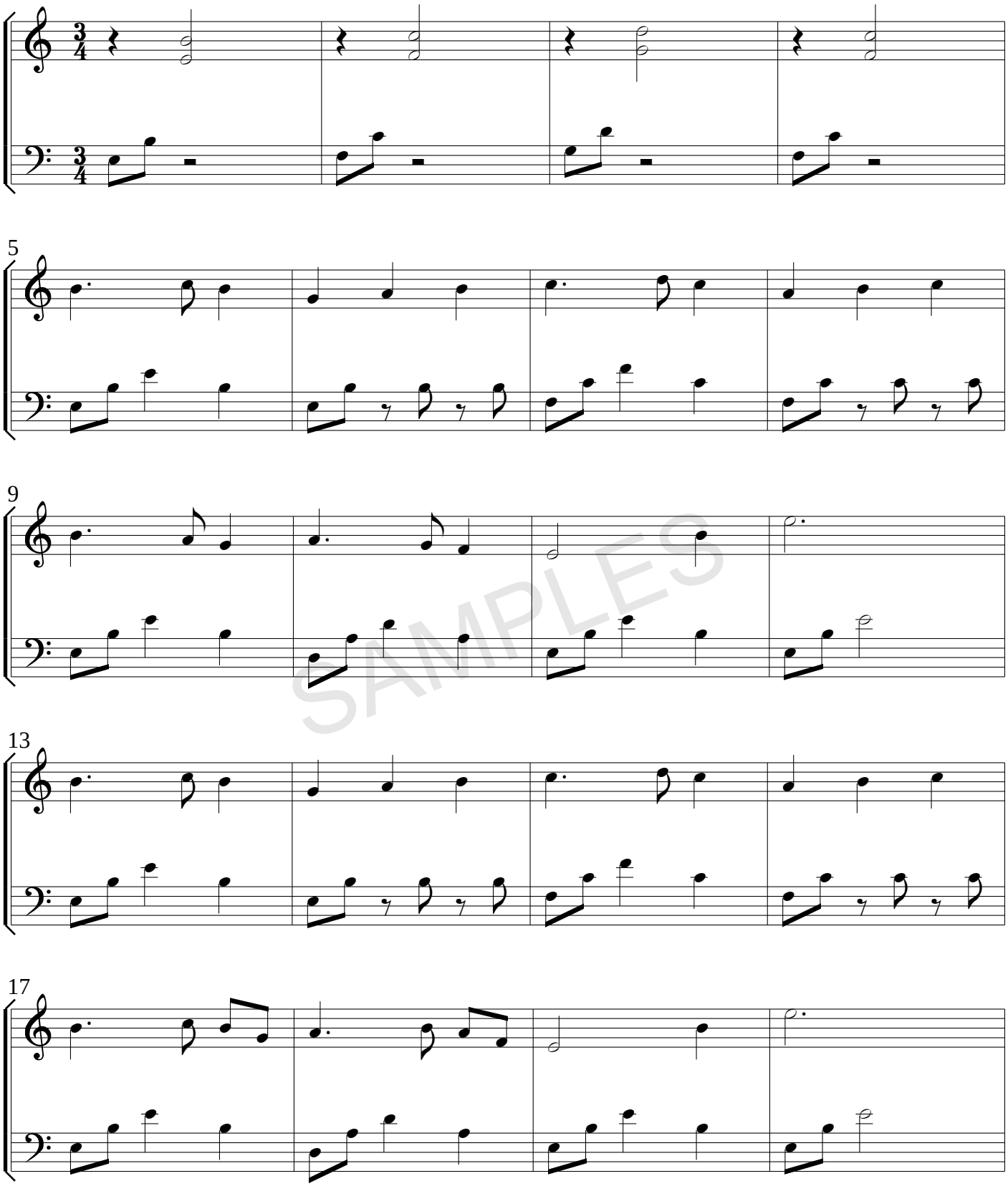

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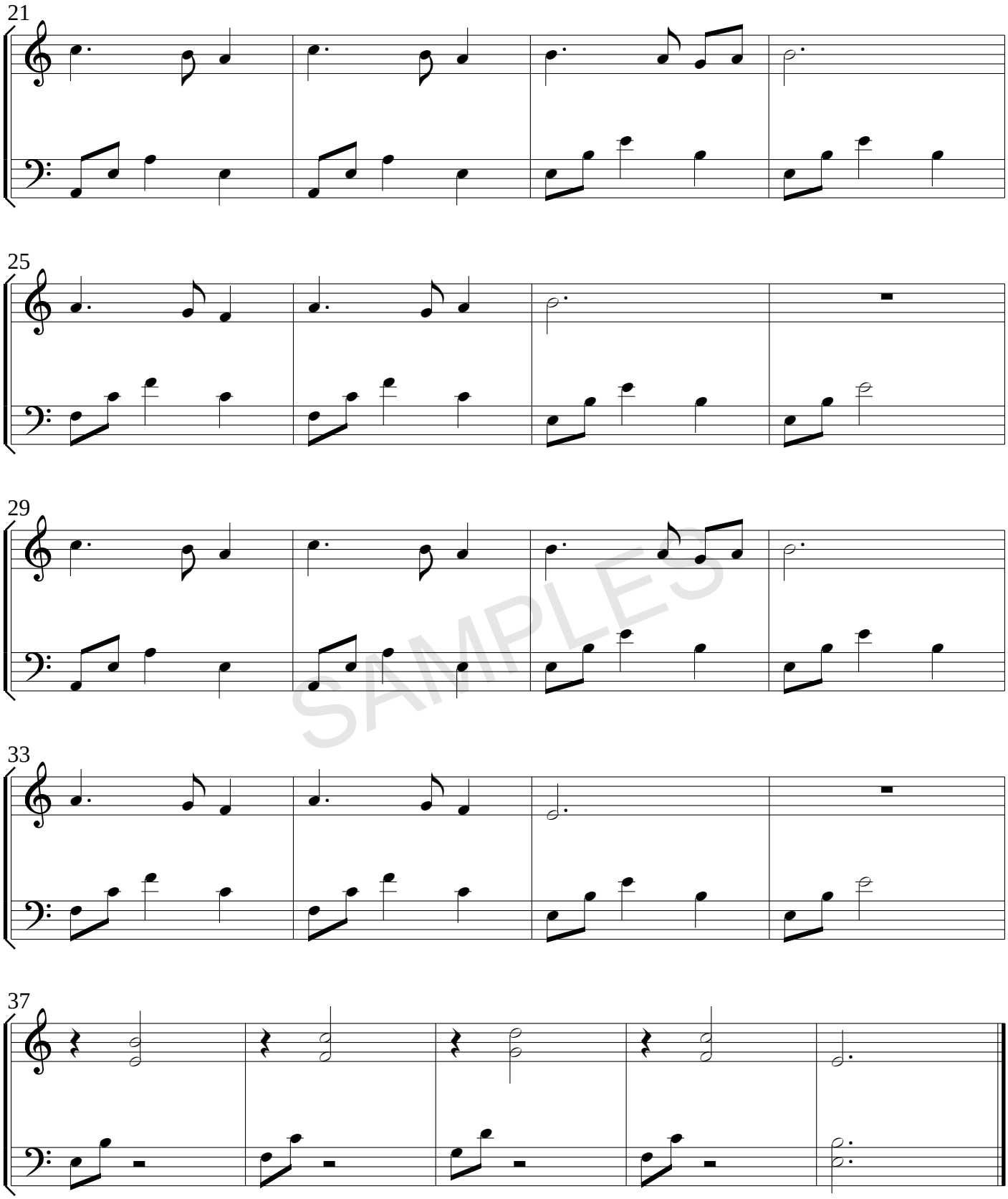

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