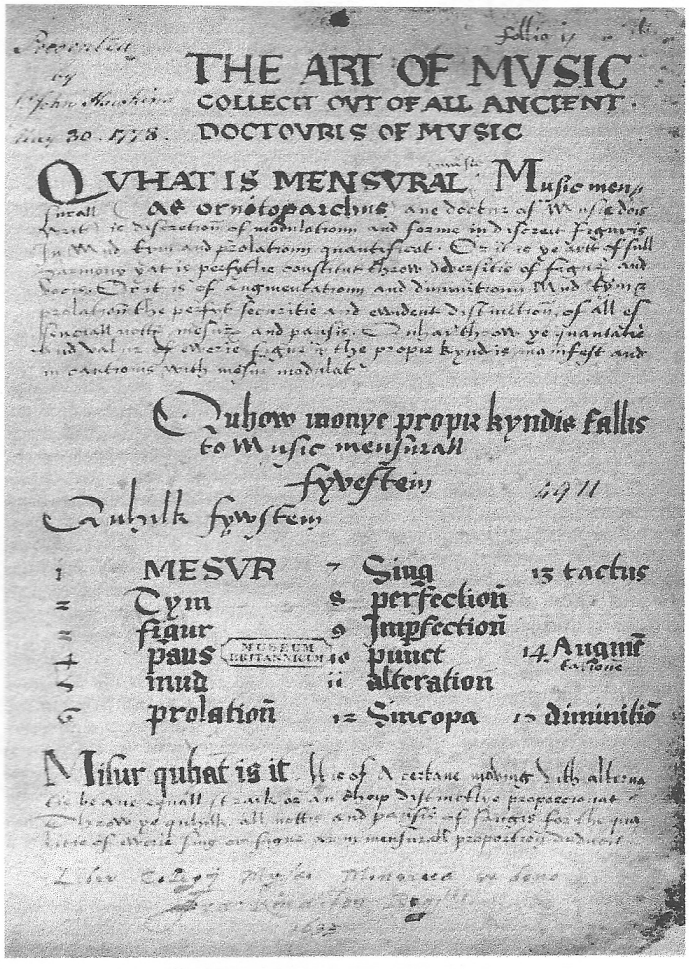
5 Pieces From

The Art of Music

Edinburgh, Scotland, c.1580



intabulated for 7c Renaissance

Lute

edited by Rob MacKillop

Forth House Publishing

Introduction

The Art of Music was the title given to a collection of vocal and instrumental pieces assembled for the Edinburgh Sang School c.1580 from the works of acknowledged masters such as Josquin, whose *L'Homme Armé* is included, and Scottish musicians such as Robert Johnston and Andrew Blackhall. Although the collection has a high didactic purpose, detailing the rules of musical composition, many of the examples which were intended to illustrate a formal point of compositional technique are in fact beautiful, unusual, fascinating and exciting pieces in their own right.

The presence of the lute in Scotland dates back to the 13th century when the Scottish poet, Thomas of Ercyldoune (the erstwhile Thomas the Rhymer), mentioned it as being present alongside the 'harpe and fethill'. All the Scottish kings and queens were apparently proficient players, as were many of the students of Saint Andrews University where the instrument formed part of the their study.

Today, most lute players are familiar with the type of repertoire associated with the Scottish lute manuscripts — what might loosely be described as the roots of Scottish traditional music. With *The Art of Music*, on the other hand, we enter the world of *Music Fyne*, that is, the classical, art and part music of the Renaissance, chiefly polyphonic and exemplified in the magnificence of the work of Robert Carver, the one Scottish composer who could stand alongside Josquin in greatness.

Scotland in the second half of the 16th century was experiencing the agonies and ecstasies of religious fervour spearheaded by Calvin and Knox. One of its effects on music was to outlaw polyphony. That *The Art of Music* survives from this period is miraculous, the only other comparable manuscript being the part-books of Thomas Wode (pronounced Wood), who had this to say concerning the problems faced by one of Scotland's foremost composers of the day:

> *...my lord James...being at the reformation...causis ane of his channons, to name, David Pables, being ane of the chief musitians into this land to set three pairtis to the tenor, and my lord commandit the said David to leave the curiosity of the musike; and sa to make plaine and dulce, and sa he hes done; bot the said David he wes not earnest.*

The devastating effect of the Reformation's stranglehold on musical

composition and performance was further exacerbated by the dissolution in 1603 of the court of James VI, which had been the central focus for *Music Fyne* in the 16th century.

A further consequence of these two negative factors is the absence of any Scottish lute manuscripts from the 16th century, in what may have been the Golden Age of lute-playing in Scotland, yet over 400 pieces survive in manuscript form from the following century. Therefore it requires a little creative detective work to give an impression of the type of music which was played on the lute during this period. By intabulating these pieces from *The Art of Music*, which does not specify any instrumentation, we can gain such an insight.

The music itself is rhythmically complex, full of vitality, and although firmly based within the contemporary European musical context, has a distinctive Scottish voice.

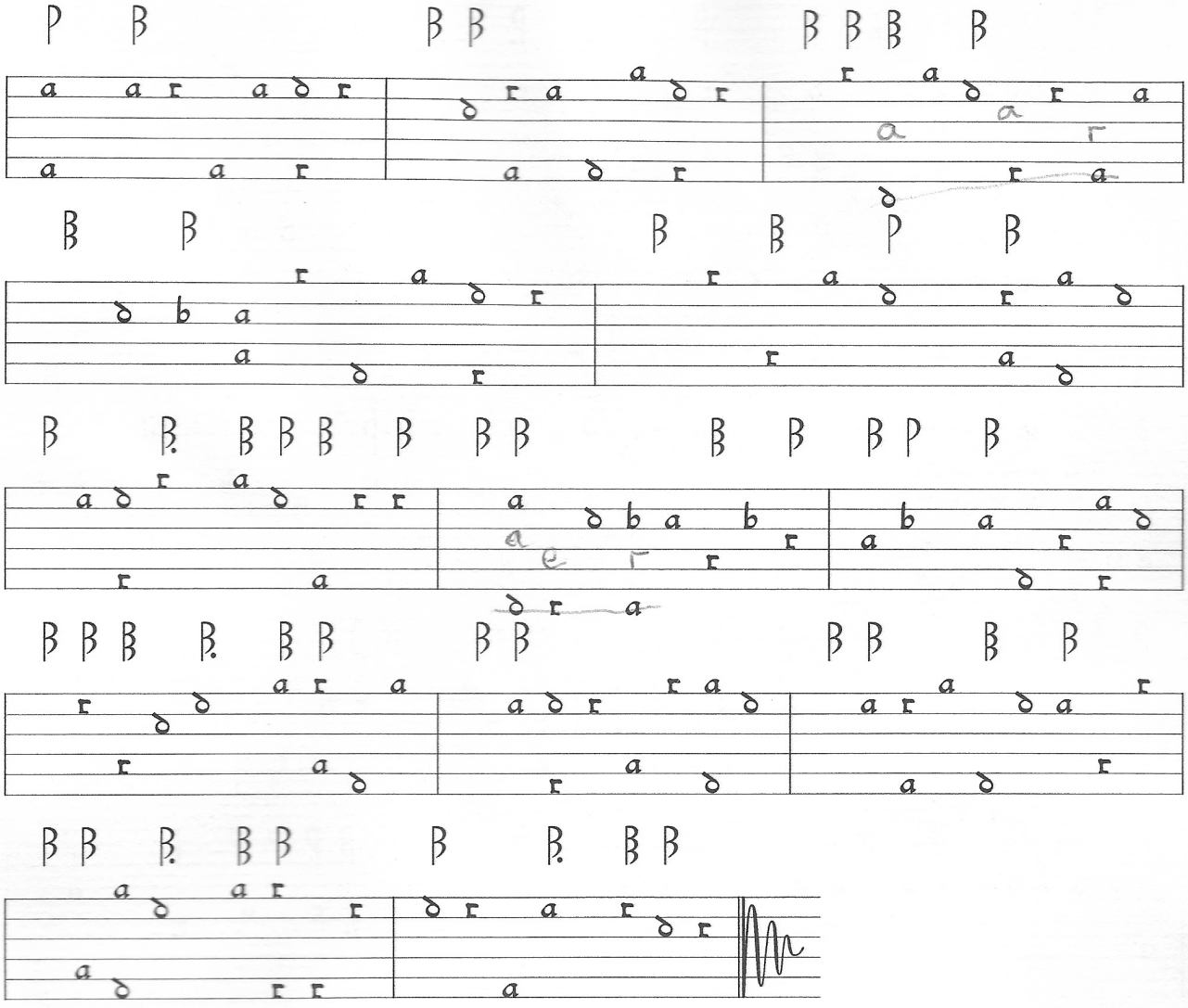
The pieces chosen are all in two parts and fit the fretboard as written. The only problem encountered was in *(Fantasie)* (page 6/7) where two bars, although technically playable, seemed excessively difficult to execute in time unless a funereal tempo was chosen from the start, or the player was in possession of very agile fingers. I have included a possible alternative for each bar which retains the essentials of what is largely an ornamental passage.

Those interested in further exploring *The Art of Music* will find a complete transcription with accompanying notes in: Judson Maynard, *An Anonymous Scottish Treatise...BM Add Ms 4911,* PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1961. The original manuscript is in the possession of the British Library.

Rob MacKillop
Aberdour
September, 1996

The Nyntene Canon

Anon



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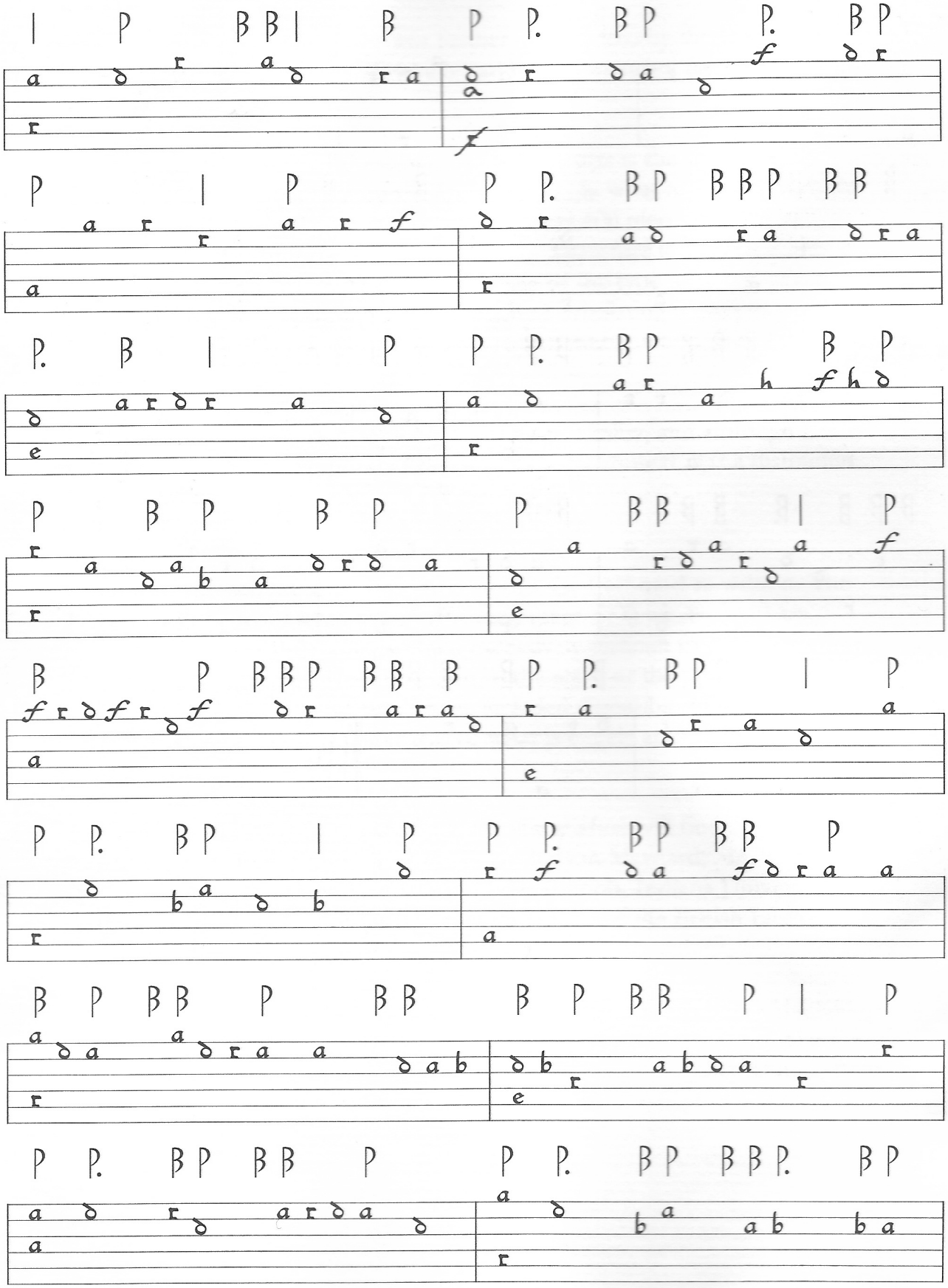
Anon



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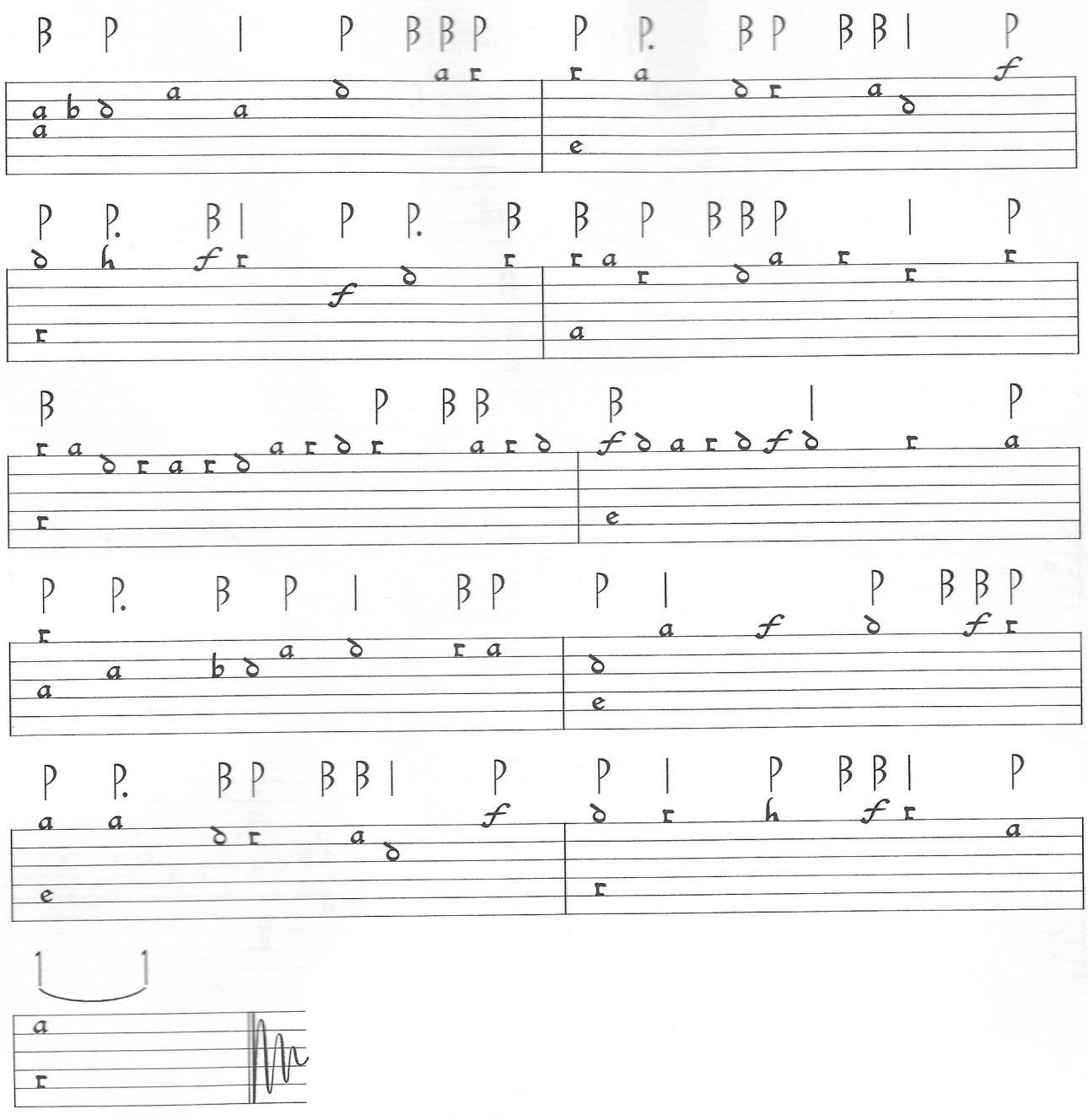

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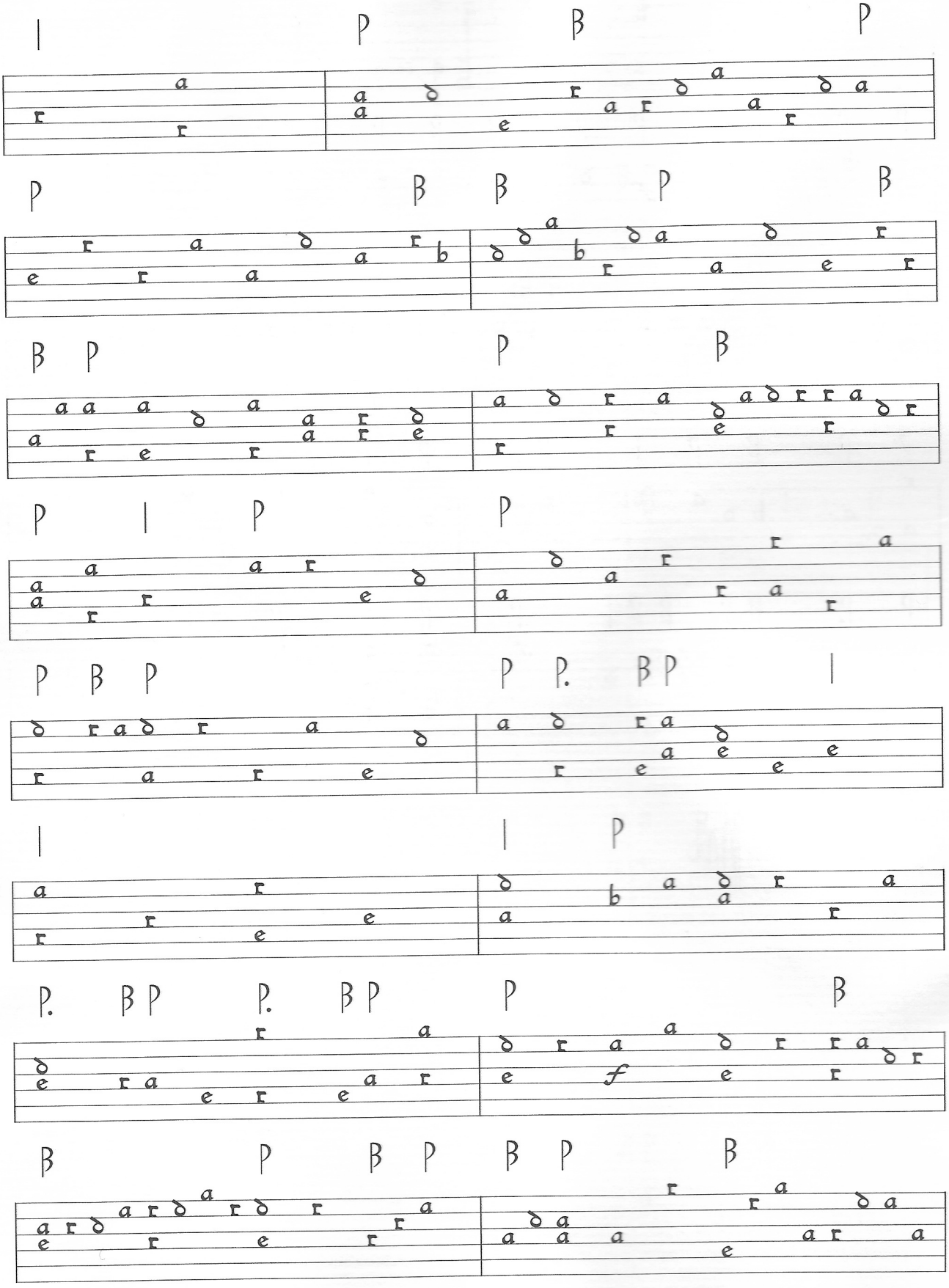
(Fantasie)

Anon



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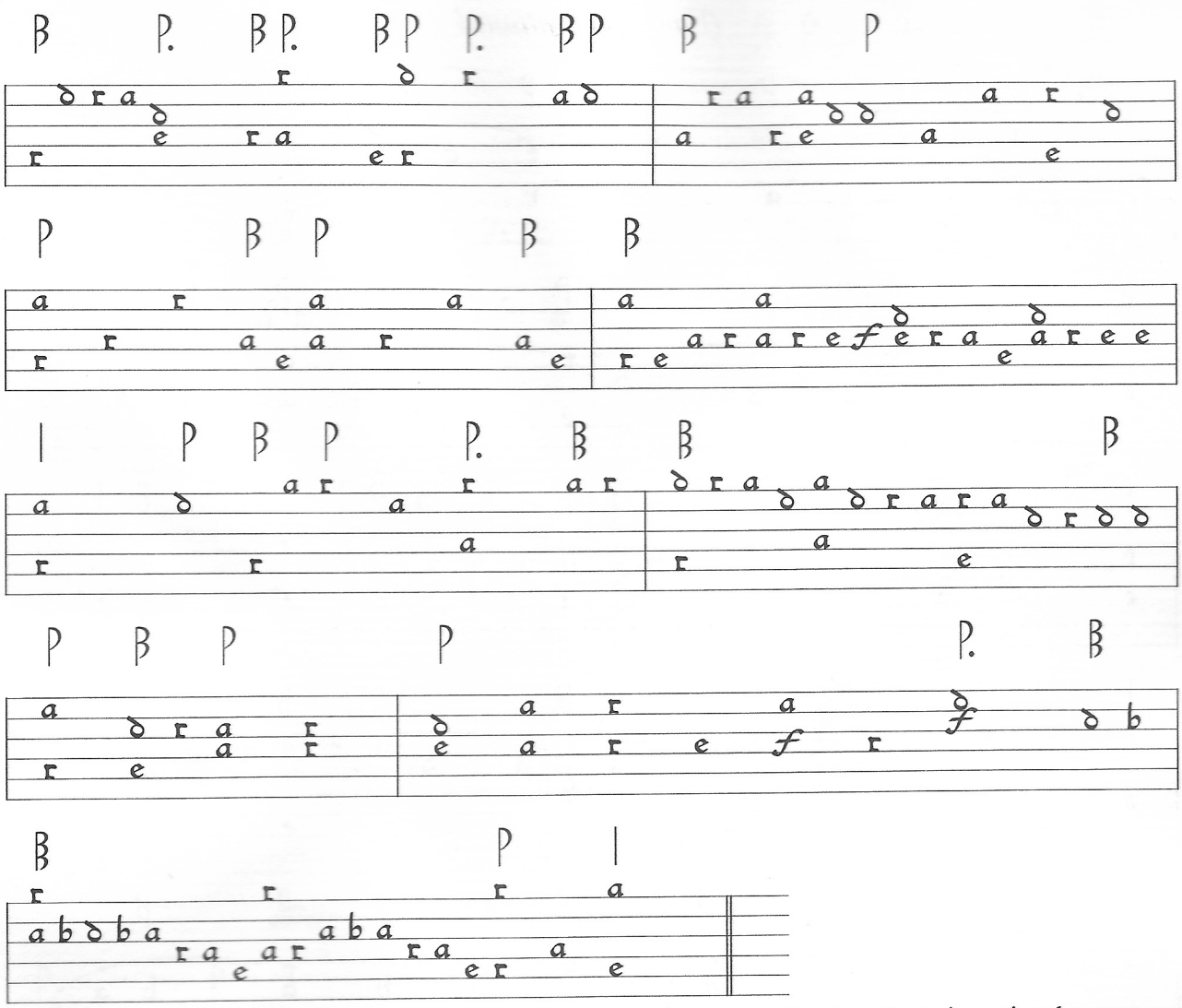

Page turn. Fantasie continued over page

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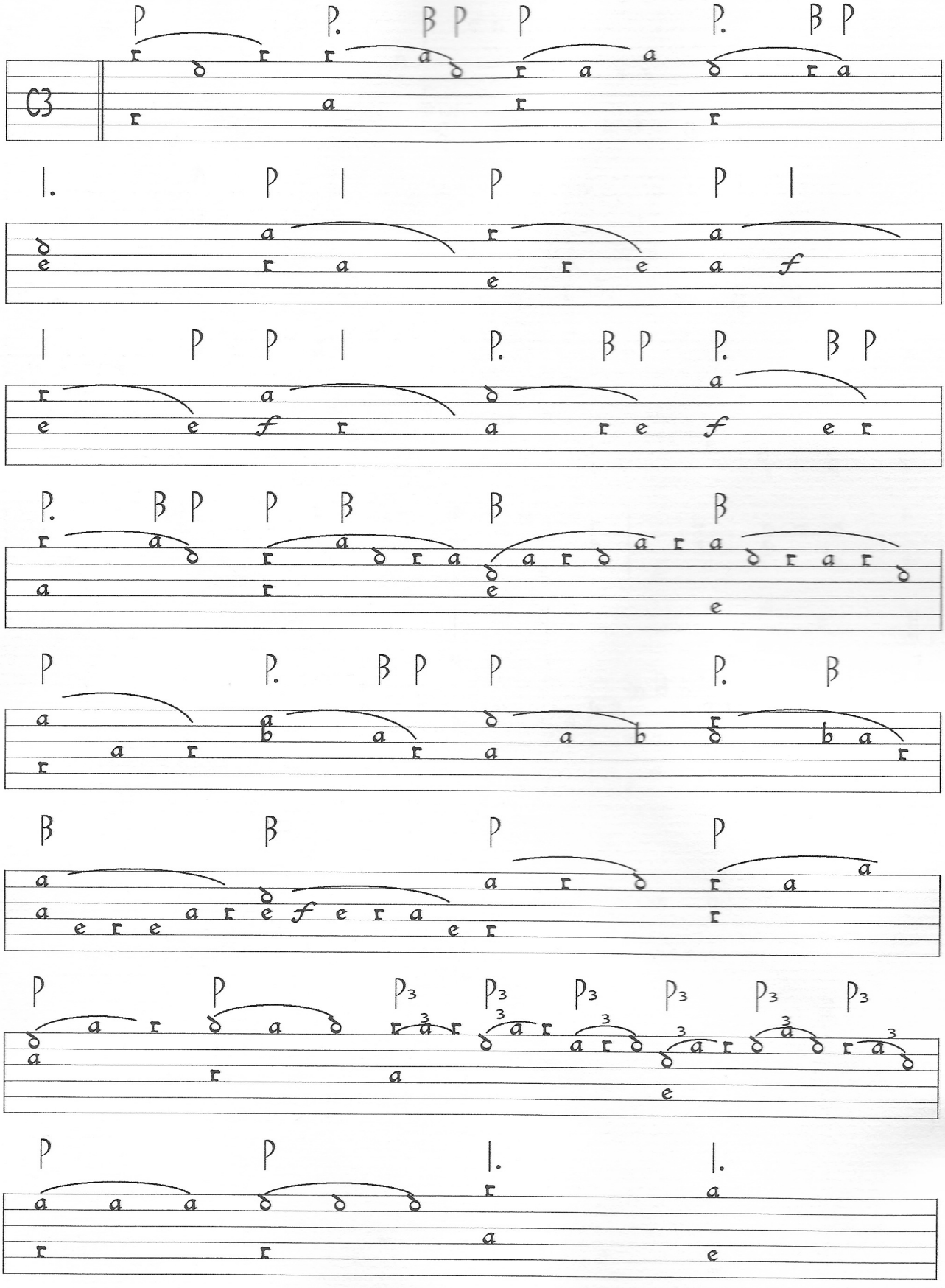

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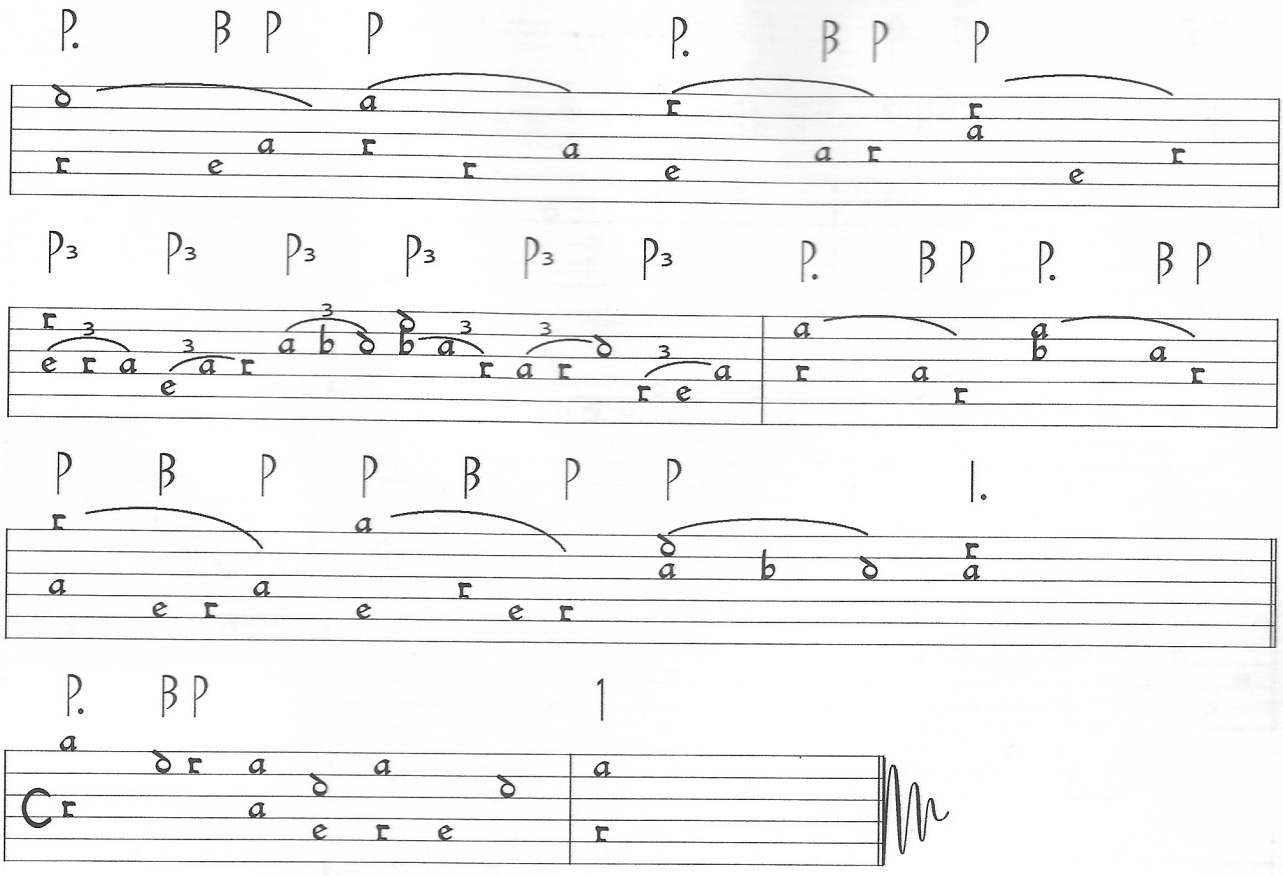
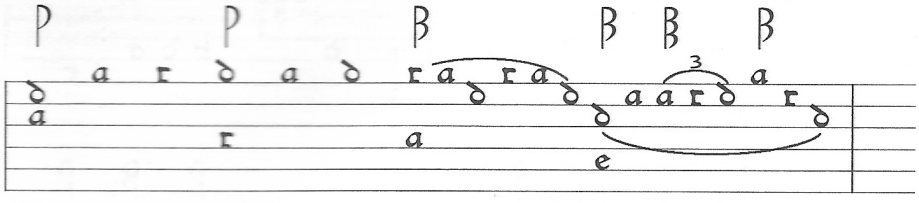
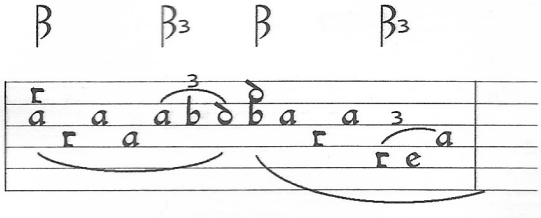


alternative notation for the eighth bar from the end



alternative notation for the fifth bar from the end



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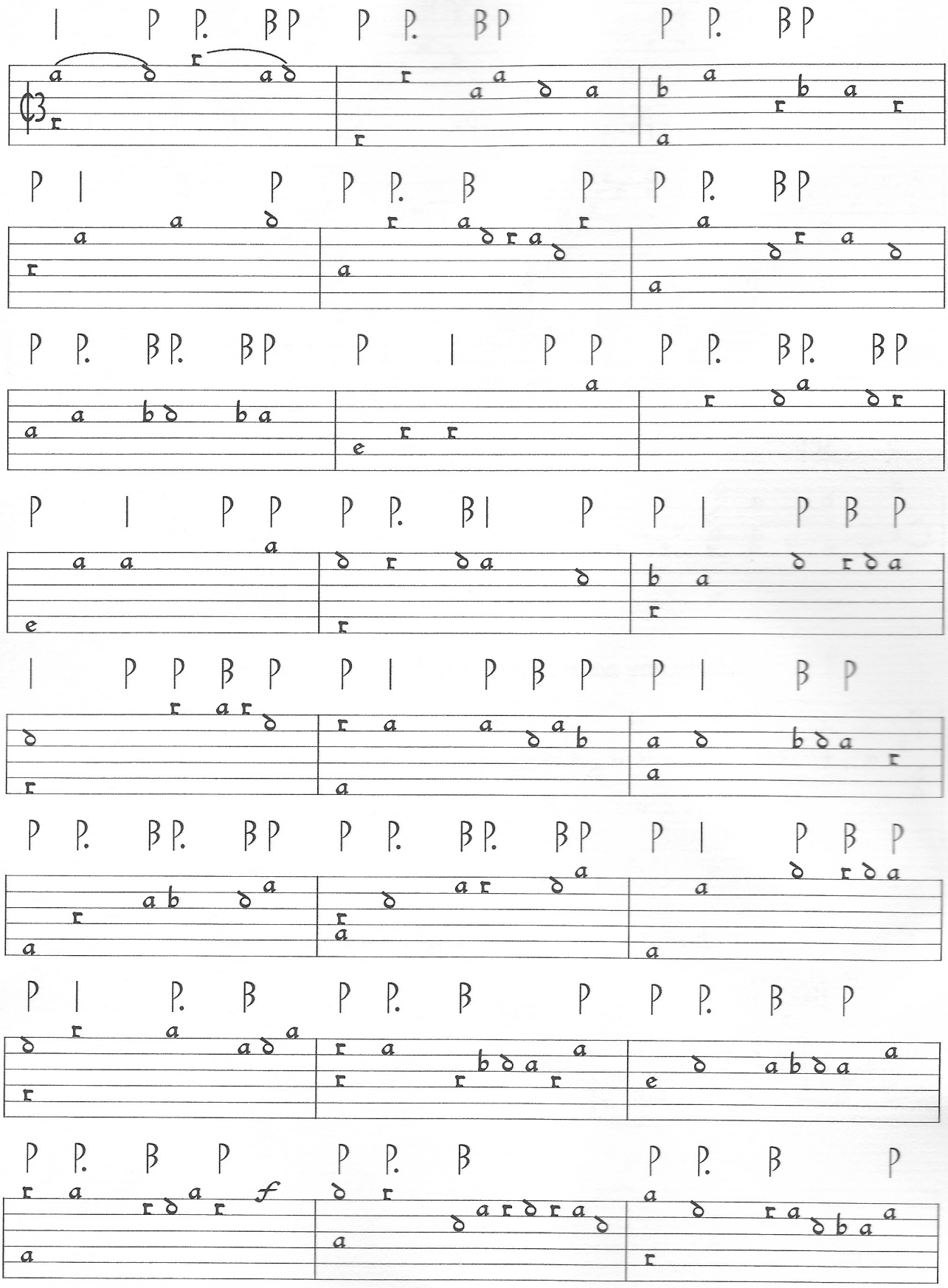

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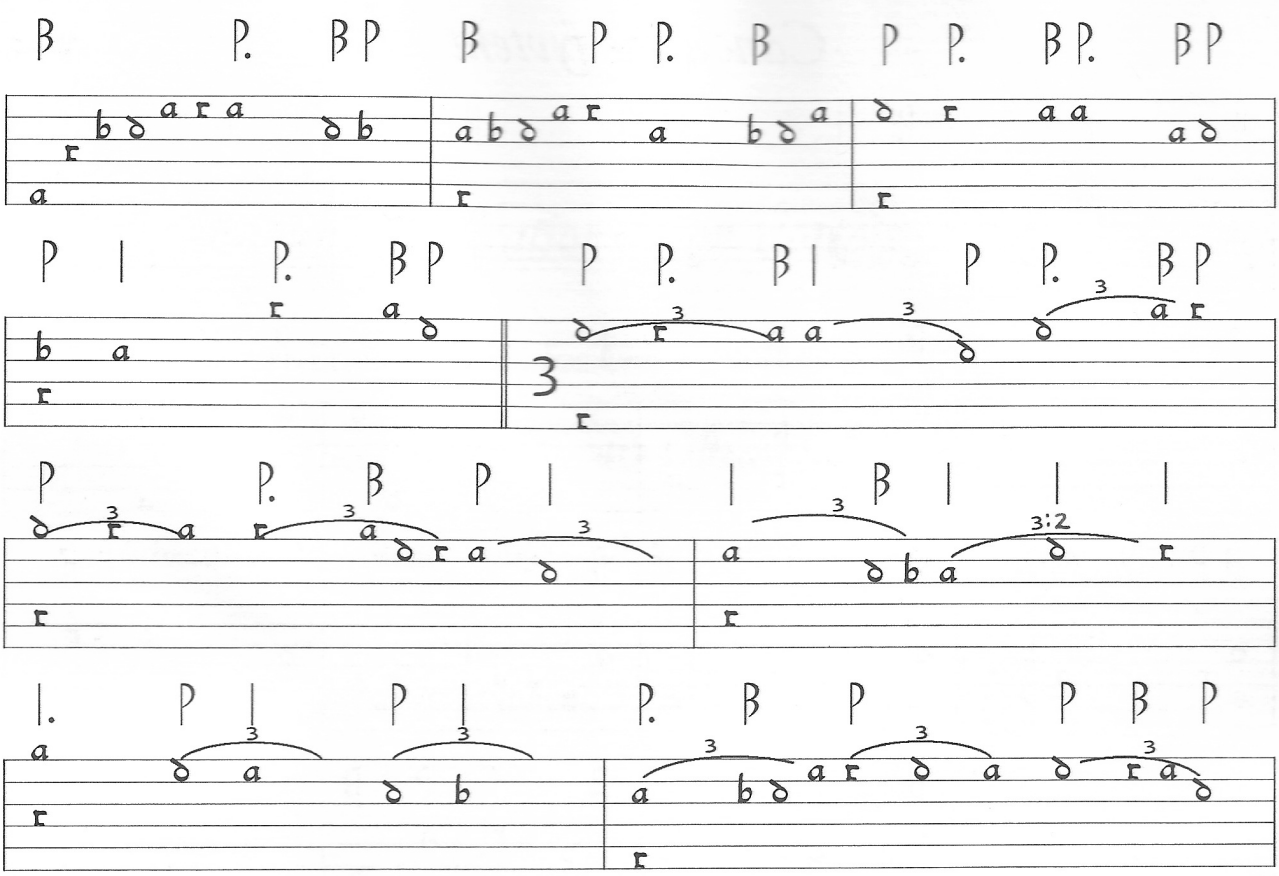

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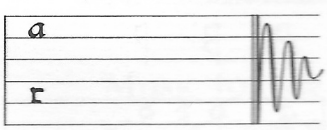

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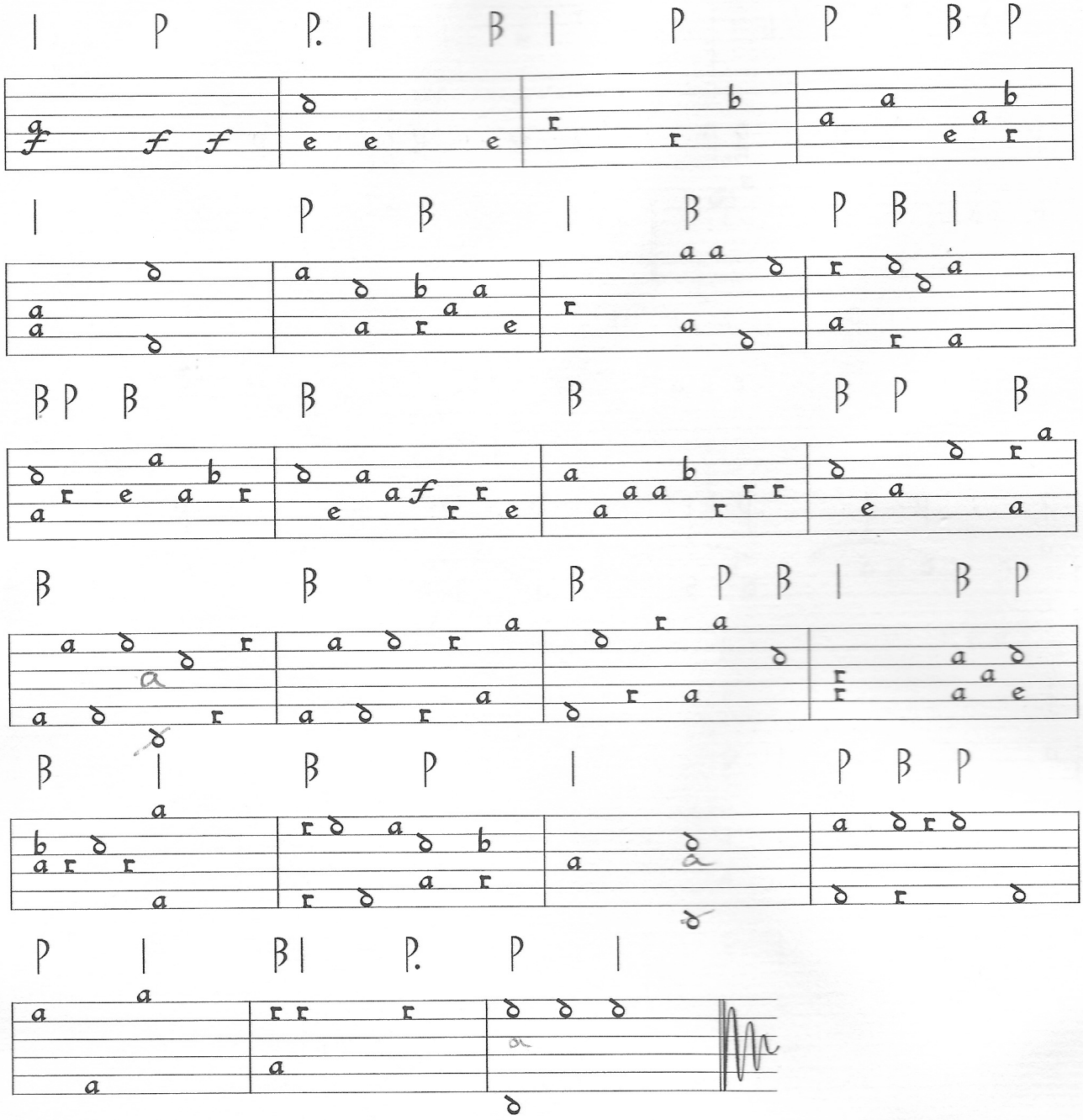

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