Medieval Suite

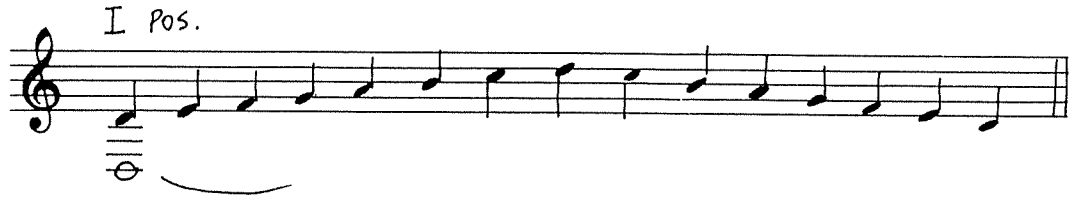
Study notes:

I have brought together three of my favourite dance tunes from Medieval Europe - 'La Danse de Cleves' from 15th Century France, 'Lamento di Tristan' from 14th Century Italy, and 'Trotto,' a lively tune from 14th Century England.

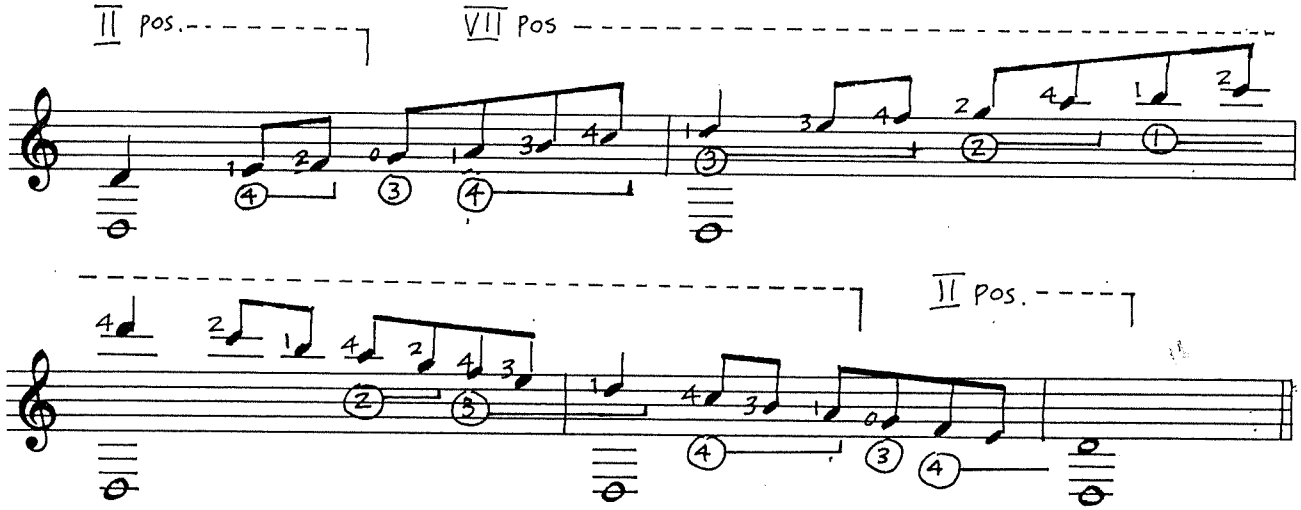
Only the melody exists in manuscript sources for these pieces. I have added the bass lines and harmony. Two of the pieces make use of a drone accompaniment (a bass consisting of the tonic, or tonic and dominant). This is thought to be a common musical practice in early Europe due to the influence of the Moors in Spain, and through the Crusaders and thier retinues (including musicians) returning home from the east.

All three tunes are in the lovely Medieval Dorian Mode (or scale pattern as we would call it these days). Here is the basic scale:

One octave Dorian Scale: *Play this in the 1st position. Tune your sixth string down one whole tone to the note D.*



Two octave Dorian Scale: *Notice that it starts in the 2nd position then shifts to the 7th. Make use of the 'open' G note (3rd string) to shift up or down. Memorise this scale.*



Medieval Suite

Tastar de Corde

('touching the strings') ~ Don King

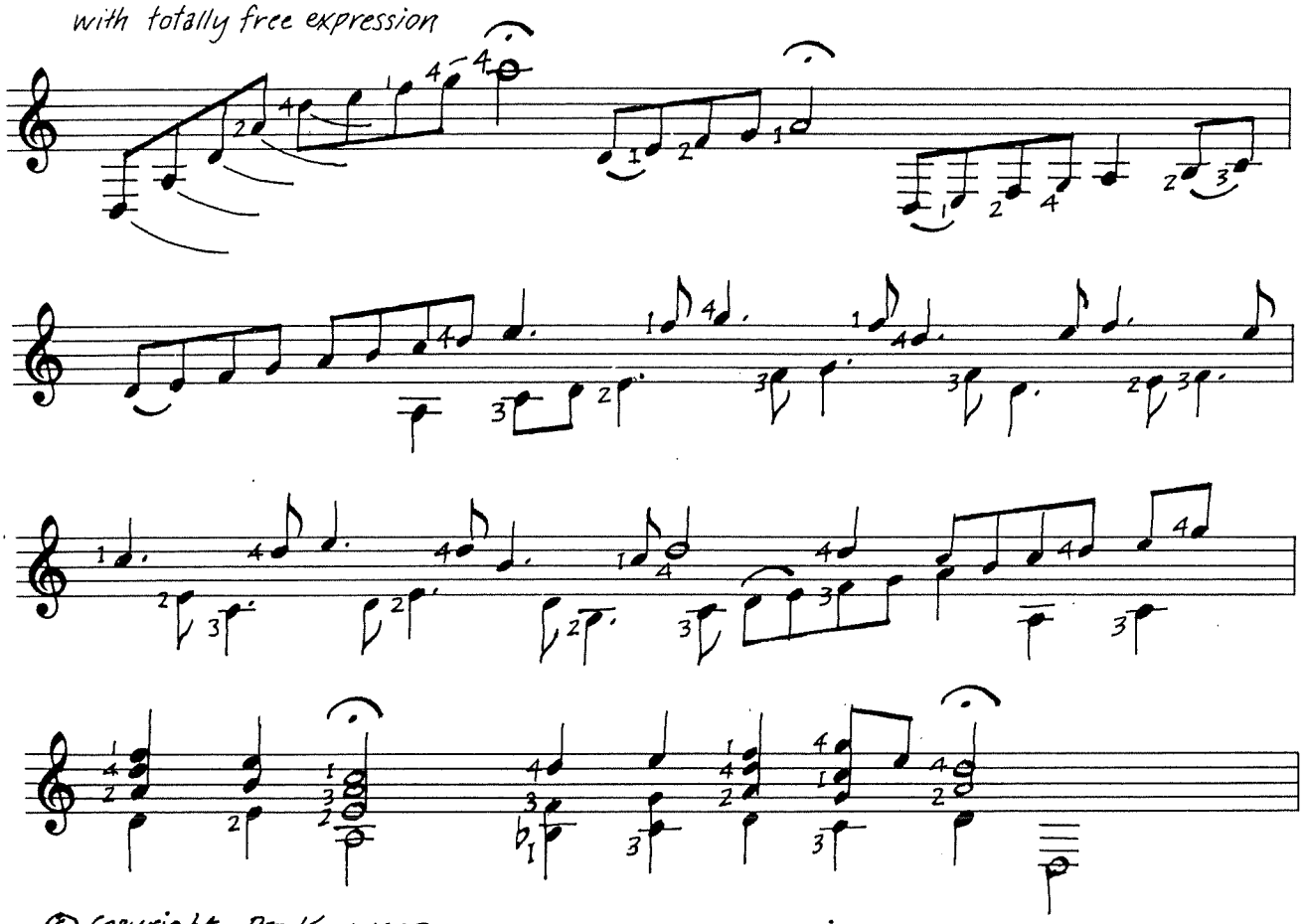
Imagine that you are back in late Medieval times. You are a famous lutenist (or guitarist) attending a magnificent banquet for selected guests at the castle of a cultured lord. After dinner when the tables are cleared, you are invited to play....

All eyes and ears are turned toward you as you gently begin to improvise, checking the tuning of the strings, and perhaps adjusting the spacing of your moveable frets to suit the mode of the pieces that you will be playing. While you run through the chords and scale of the mode, your fingers and mind loosen, and your creativity starts to flow. The atmosphere becomes hushed and expectant....

This is how a soloist would often begin a performance. I have written an outline of a short 'Tastar de Corde' for you to experiment with. ('Tastar de Corde' simply means 'touching the strings'). You'll notice that there are no bar lines. You are perfectly free to express it in any way you feel. Approach it as if you were improvising - 'warming up' — 'feeling your way', searching for creative ideas. Play it differently each time. Use rubato -slowing down, speeding up, pausing, soft, loud etc. You may wish to add to it, or take some of the ideas further. But at the end (perhaps after being busy with fast scales), turn the chord section into a tranquil and peaceful close. Then proceed to the following pieces.

TUNE string ⑥ to D

with totally free expression



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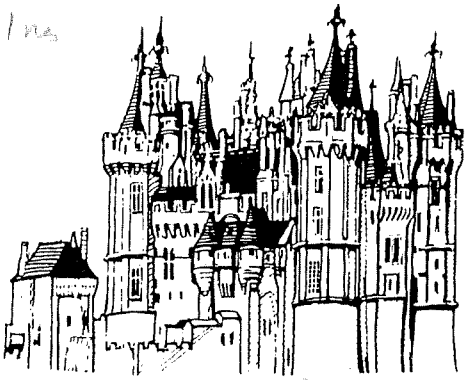
32 ÷ 3 = 10-66 lns

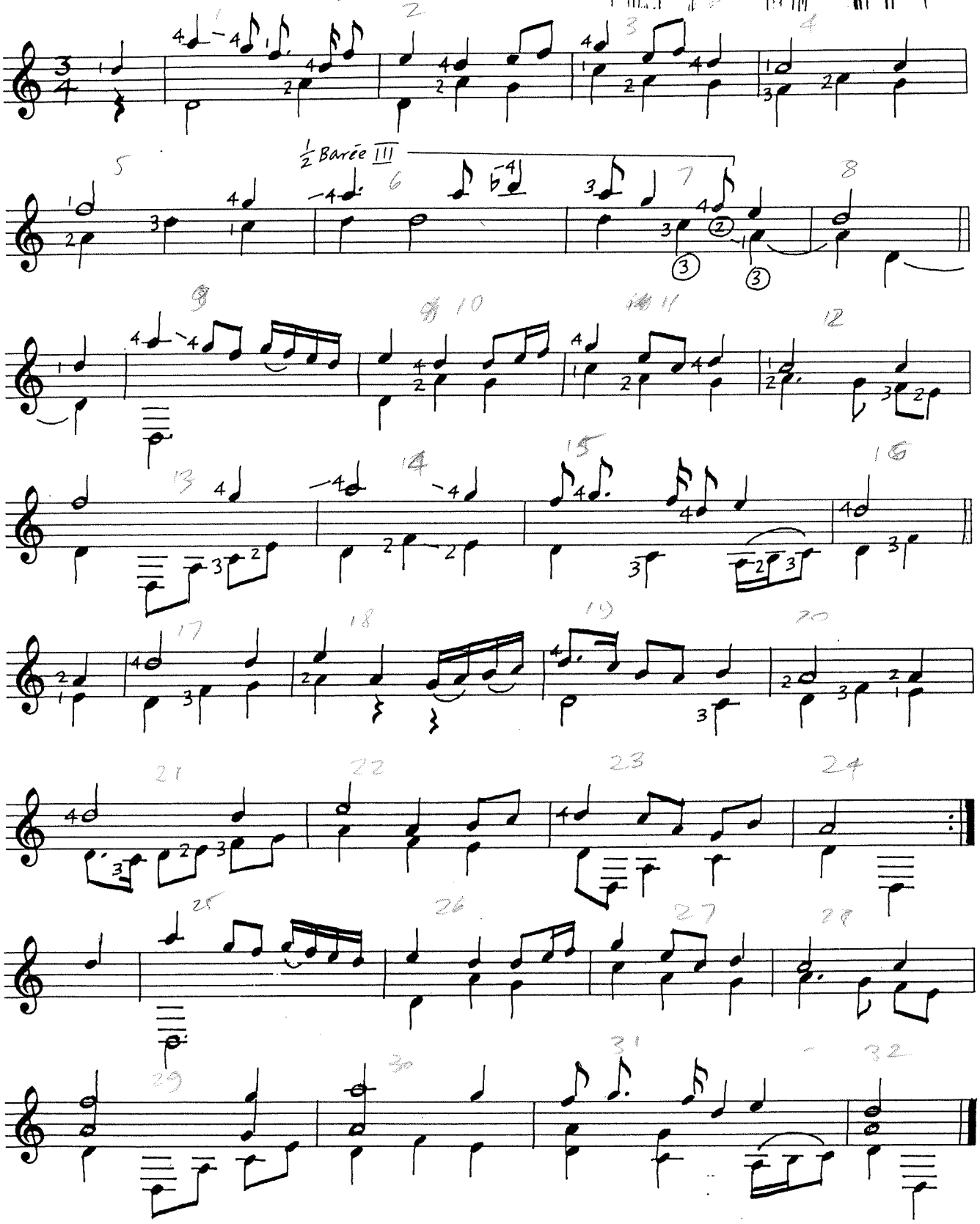
24 ÷ 3 = 8 lns

La danse de Cleves

Anon. 15th C. Arr. Don King



Rhythmically, but with elegance. ♩ = 82



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Lamento di Tristan *Anon. 14th C. Arr. Don King*

The legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table was very popular throughout Medieval Europe. Part of the legend tells the story of Tristan - one of the "greatest" of knights" and his clandestine and ill-fated love affair with the beautifull Isolte.

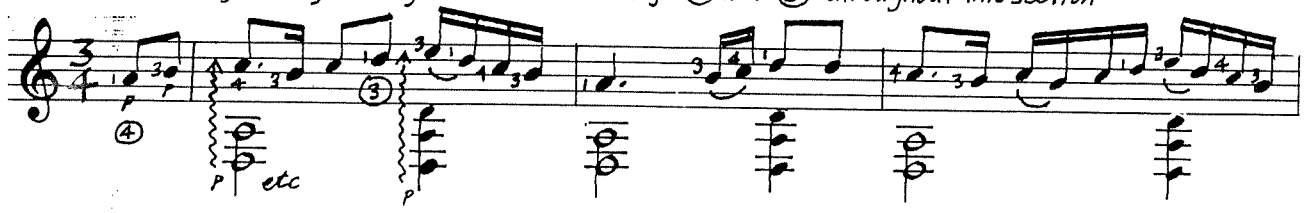
'Lamento di Tristan' is a rare surviving example of a dance tune of the Minstrels who wandered from town to town, and court to court singing ballads, telling stories and dancing. Perhaps this lament is meant to express the sad love story of Tristan and Isolte and thier tragic deaths.

In the 1st section (and other sections later), play the arpeggiated chords and all melody notes, rest stroke with your thumb. In all sections, make expressive use of vibrato - especially when playing in higher positions.

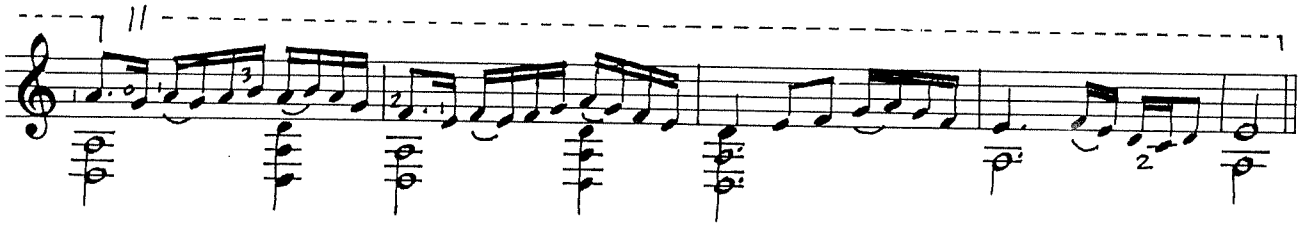
Expressively - with emotion ♩ = 46

VII

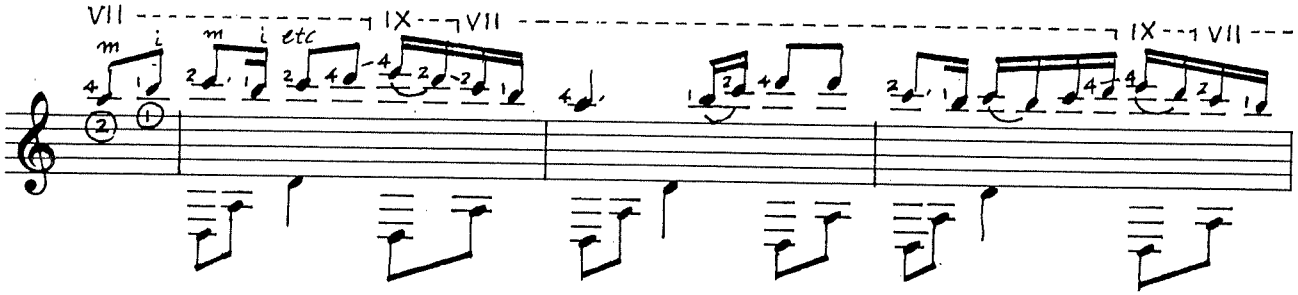
Play melody with your thumb on strings ④ and ③ throughout this section



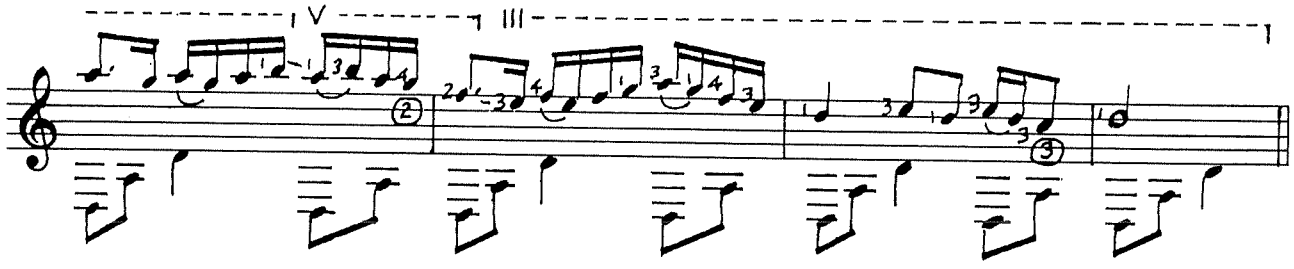
II



VII IX VII IX VII



V III



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II Play melody with thumb

III Play melody with fingers

VII IX VII

V III

II Pos.
Play melody with thumb on strings ④ & ③

I

VII II

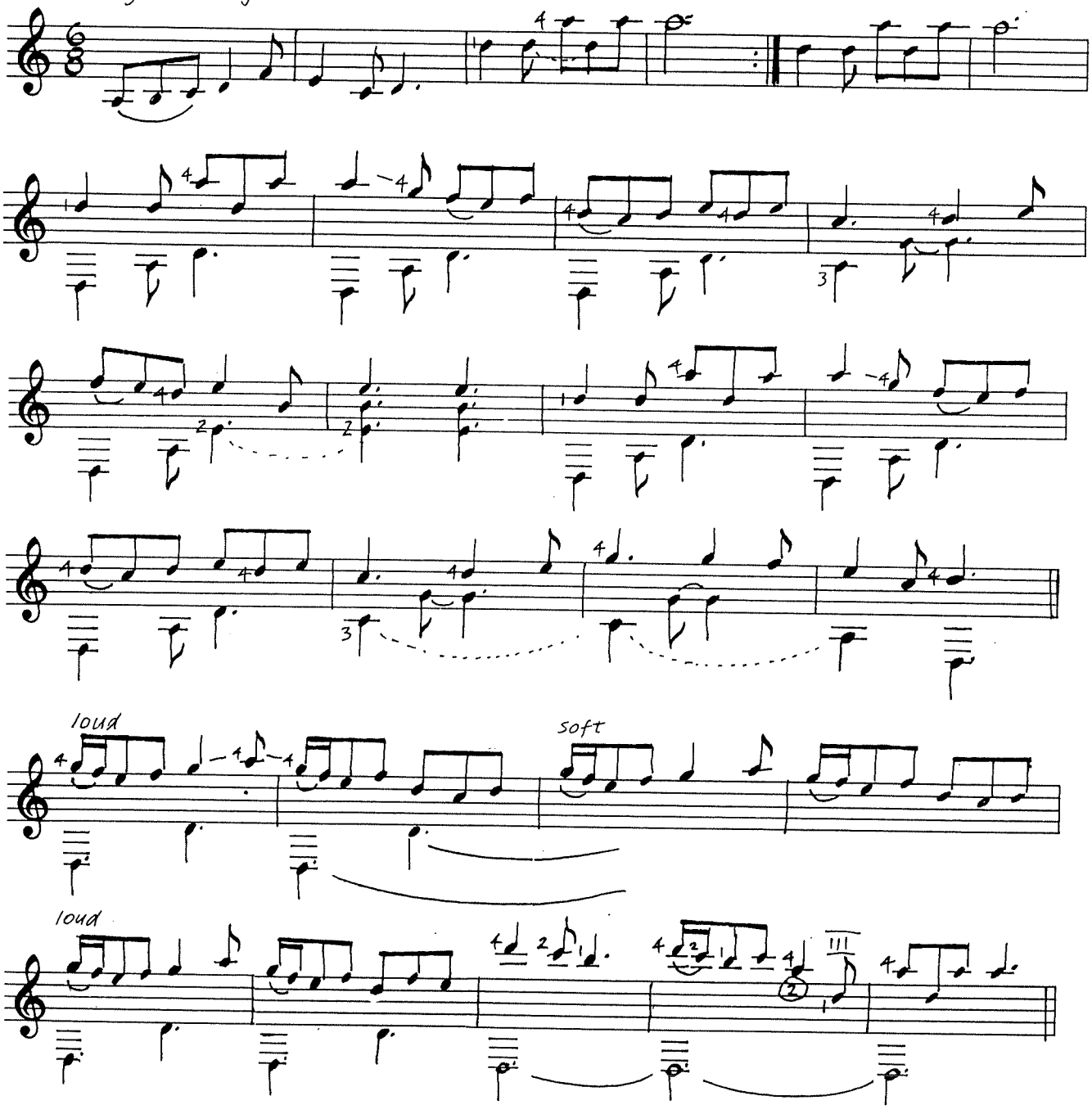
soft

Trotto *Anon. 14th C. Arr. Don King*

In this lively dance tune, the main theme is played three times. In between there are 2 short 'improvised' sounding sections (We are fortunate to have surviving in manuscript these short sketches of improvisations from the 14th. Century – very rare). You can imagine a band of musicians playing the theme, then a 'star' soloist 'showing off'. Notice the 3 bar 'key' phrase at the end of these sections – this phrase could let the band know that the improvisation is about to end, and to get ready to play the theme together again.

You might like to write your own 'improvisations.' If you do, make them 'showy' but idiomatic, in other words easy to perform – but sound as if they were virtuosic. Have fun!

Lively – with vigour ♩. = 106



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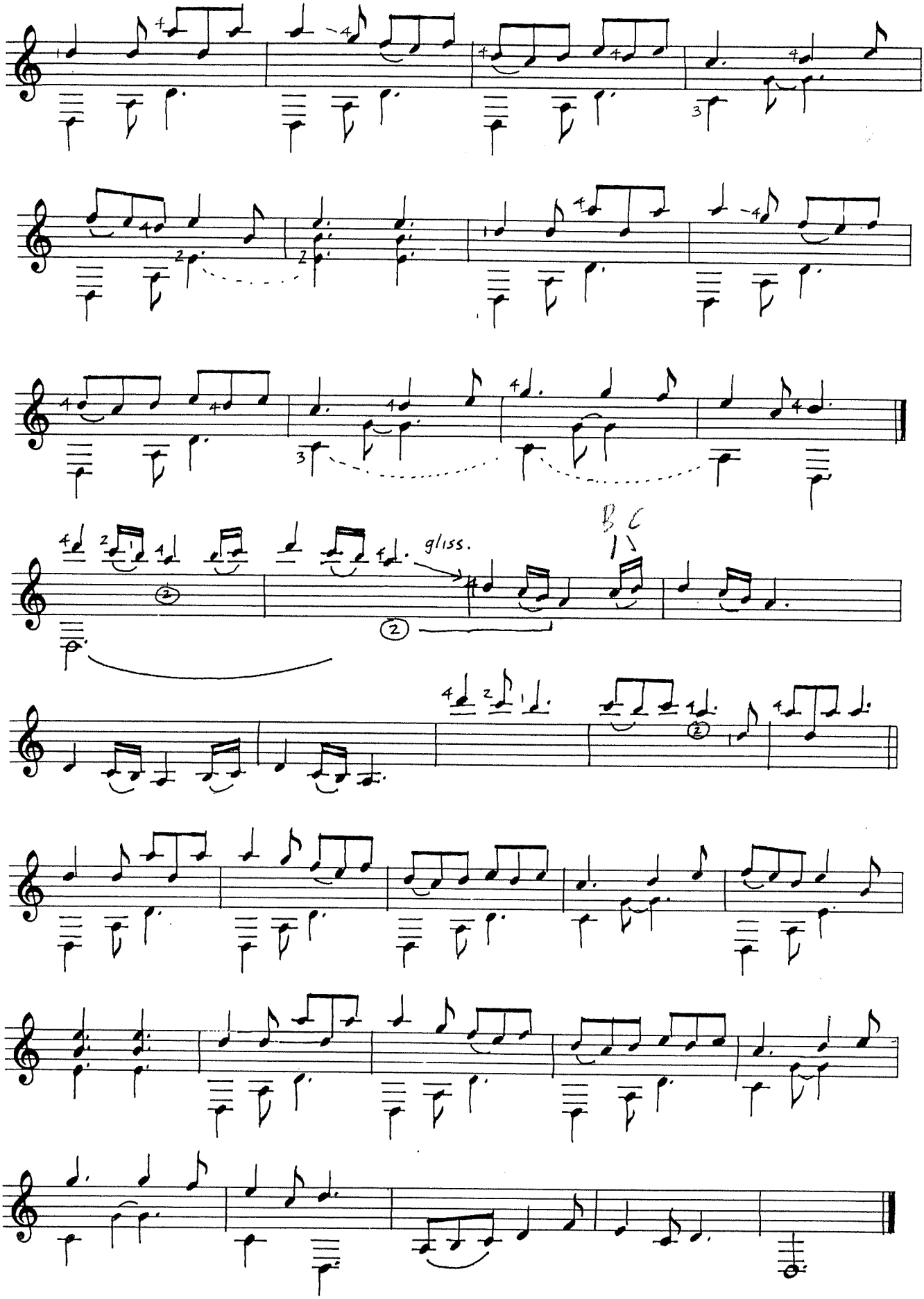
gliss.
B C