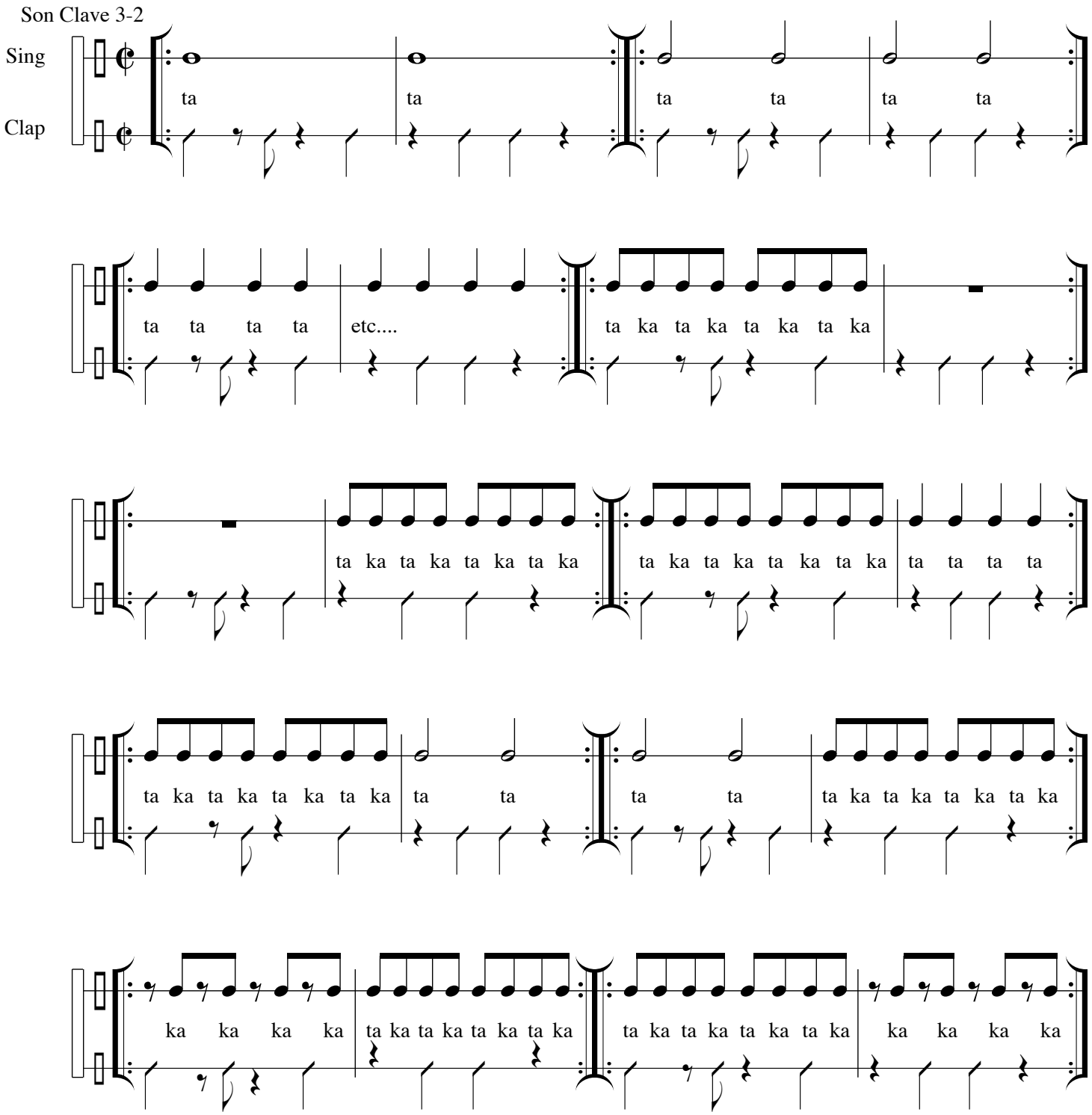
Preparatory Clave Exercises

Practice these exercises by clapping the clave while singing the top line.
Although the exercises are written in cut time, try playing them also in 4/4.



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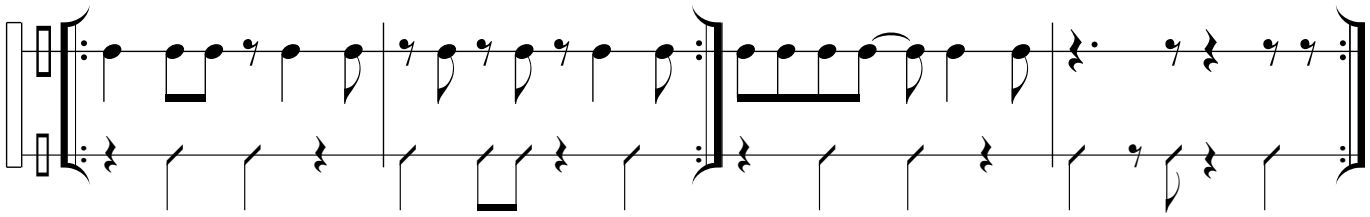

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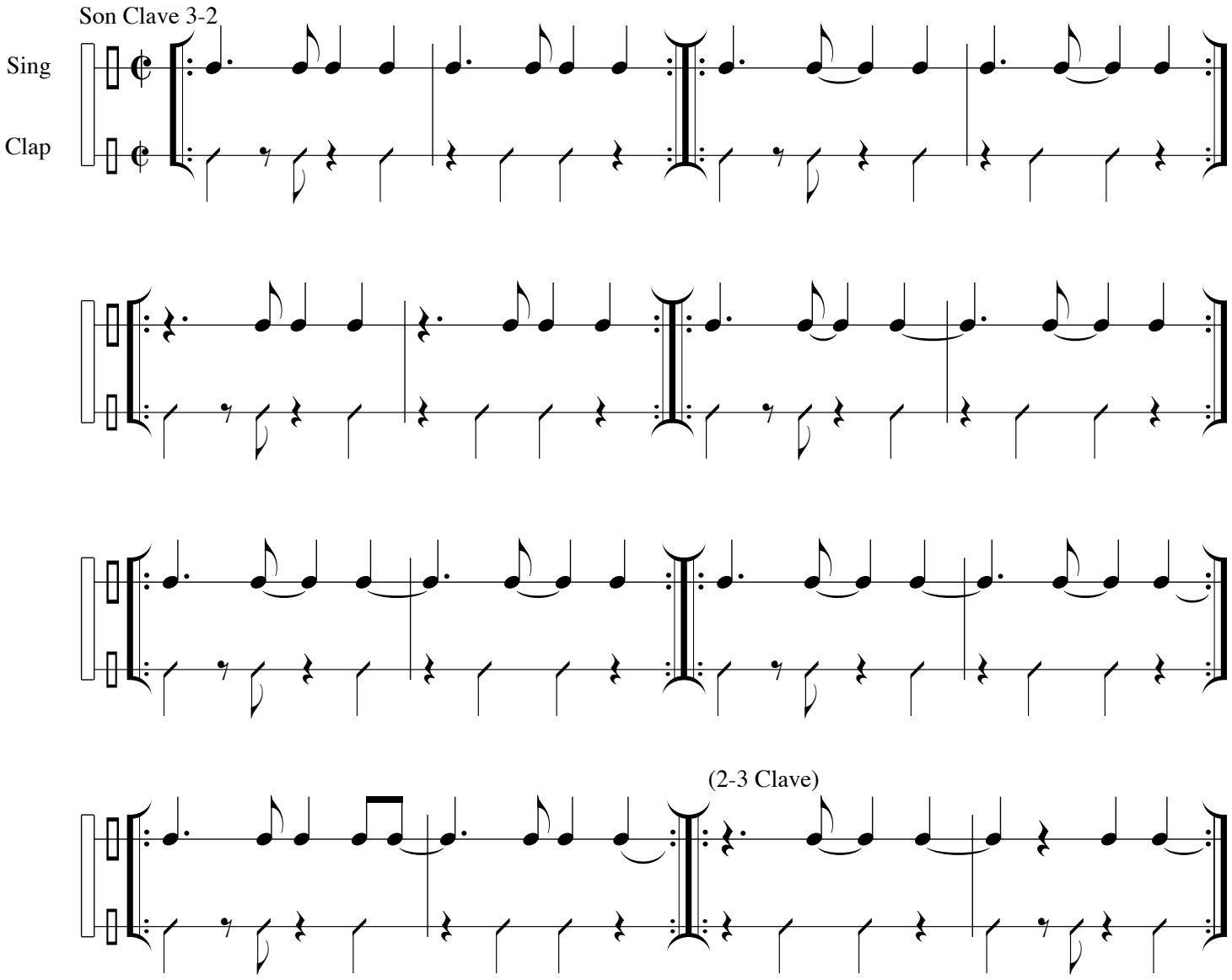
Tumbao Exercises

The tumbao (bass line) generally anticipates the harmony consistently. It's one of the more difficult parts to feel.



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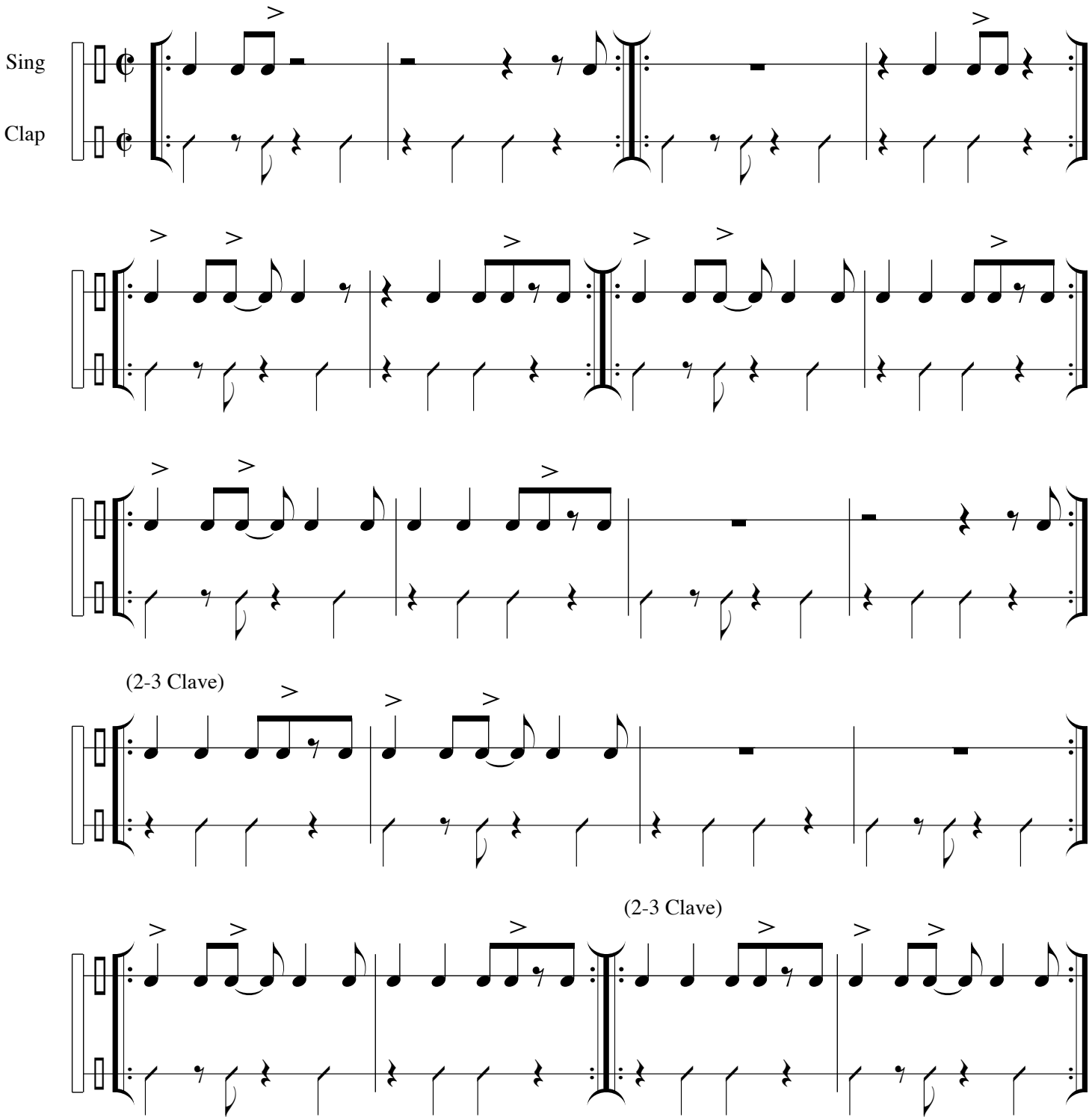
Cascara Exercises

The cascara pattern is very useful when building your own lines, or listening for the direction of the clave.

Son Clave 3-2



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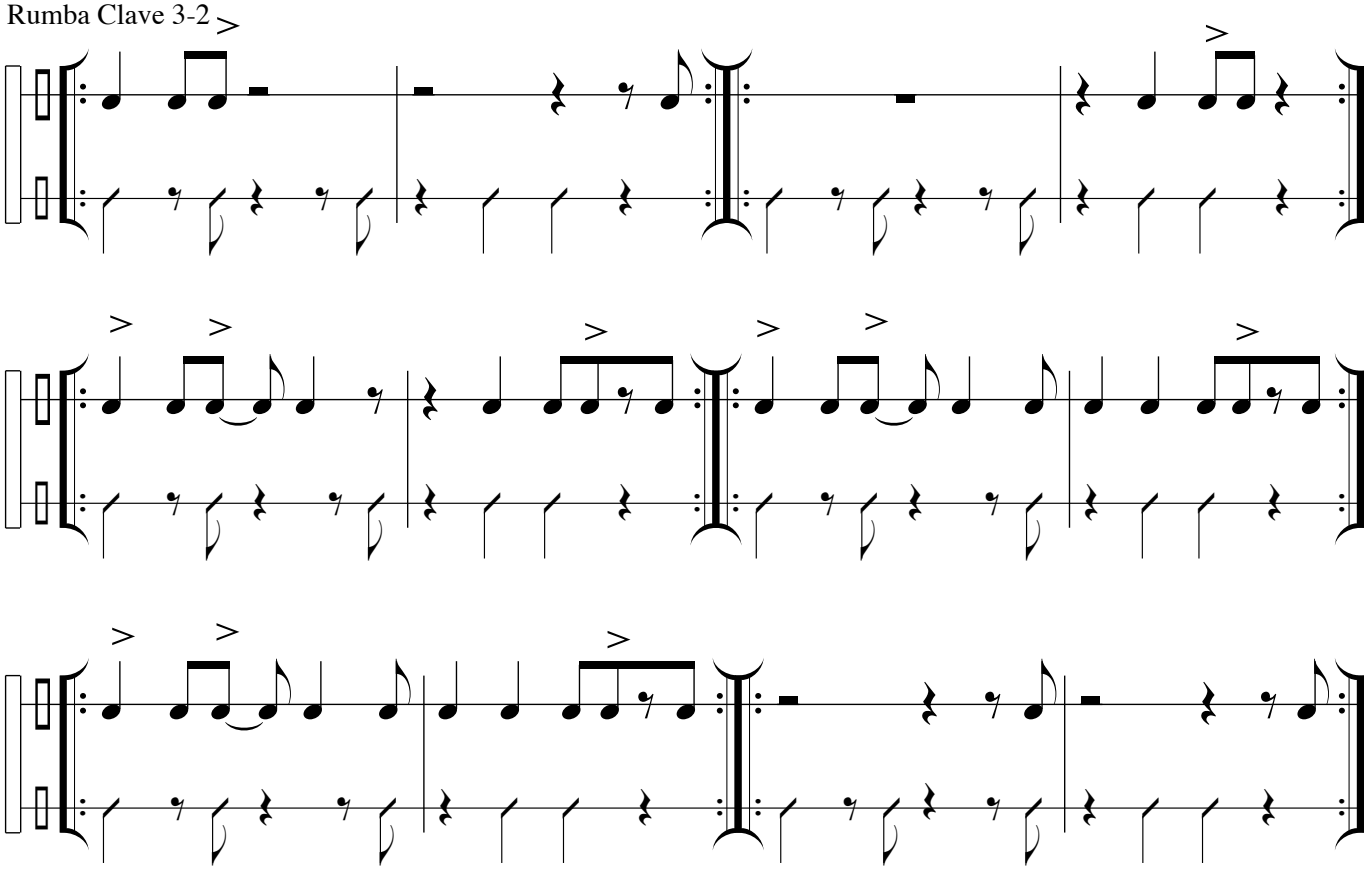
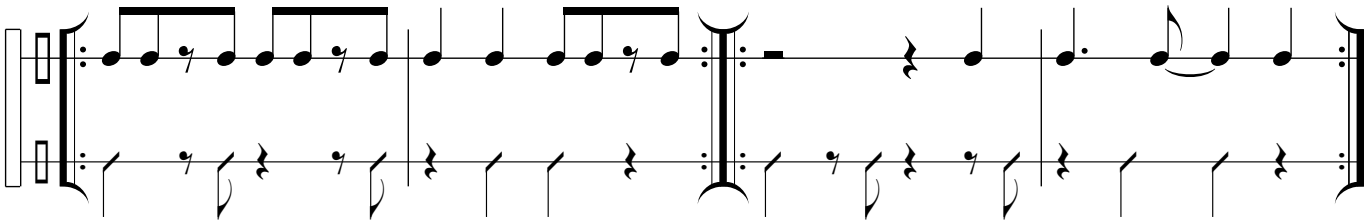
Rumba Clave 3-2



("Palito" pattern)



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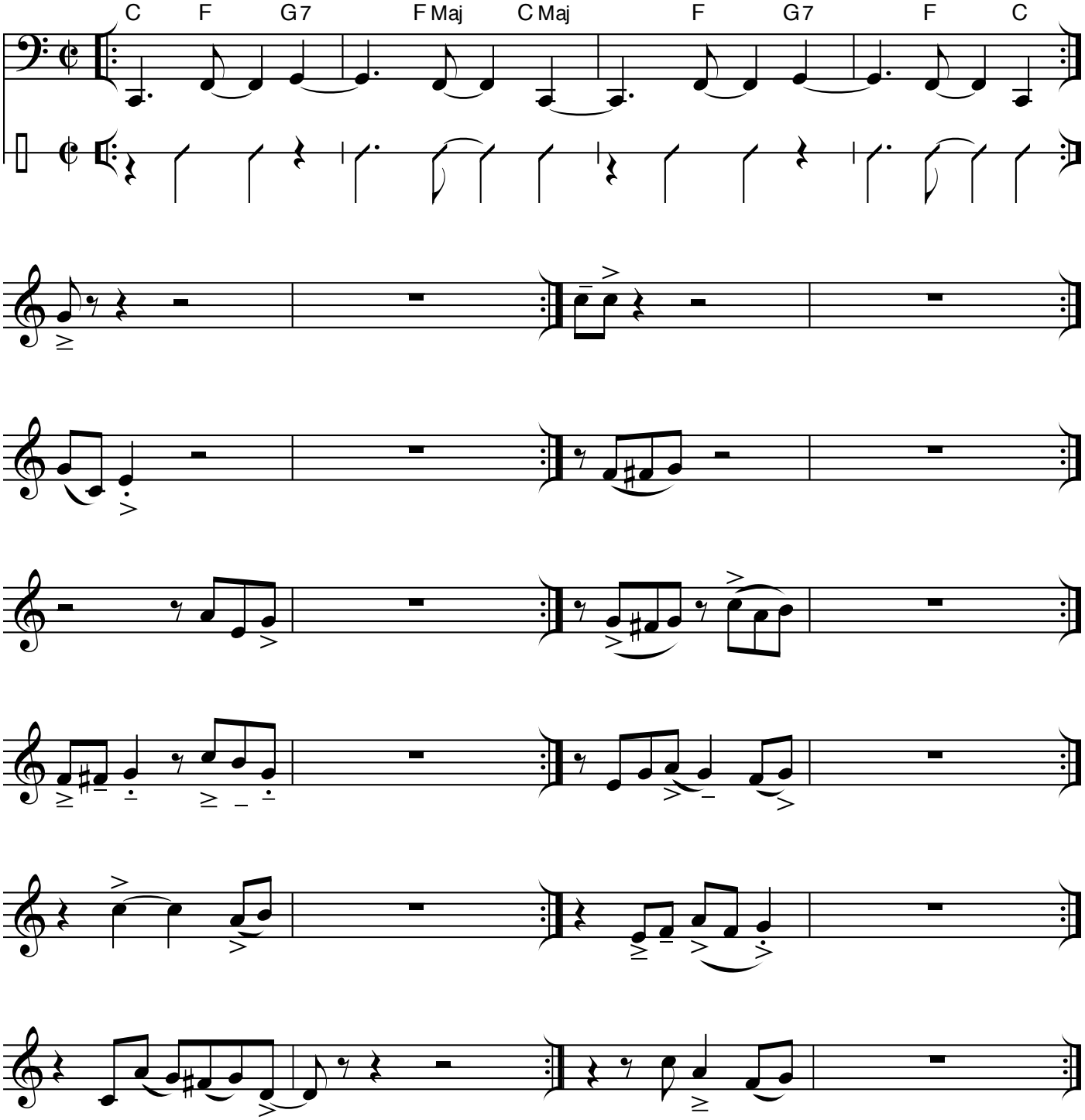
I IV V7 IV in C Major

1. Sing the rhythm.
2. Sing while clapping the clave.
3. Play the melody with the recording (I IV V7 IV in C major).
4. Change the pitches of the rhythm.
5. Transpose to other keys, and play along with the recording.

** These phrases were written in two measures rather than four measures for the sole purpose of this exercise.

2-3 Son Clave



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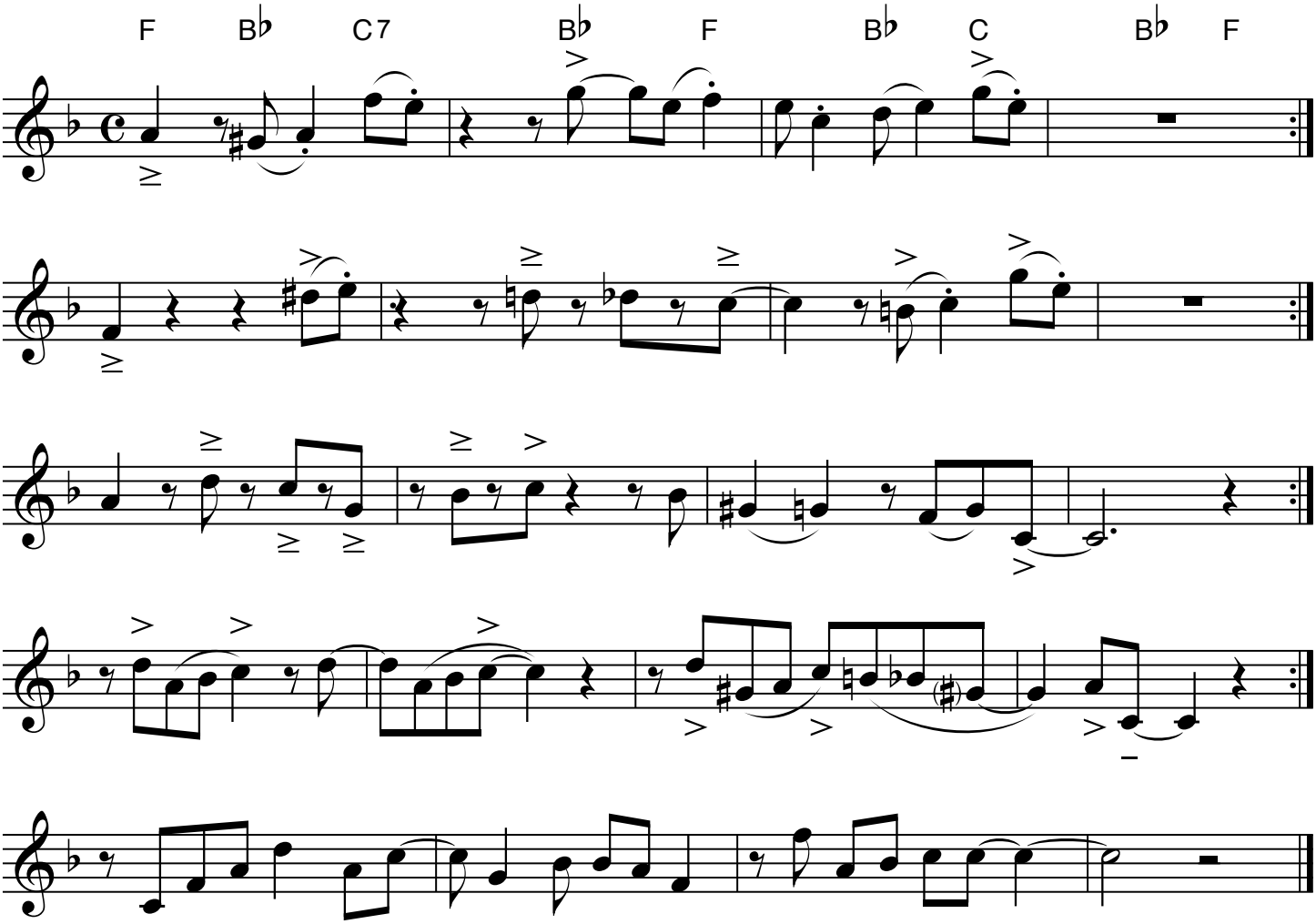
I IV V7 IV in F Major

4-Measure Phrase

2-3 Son Clave



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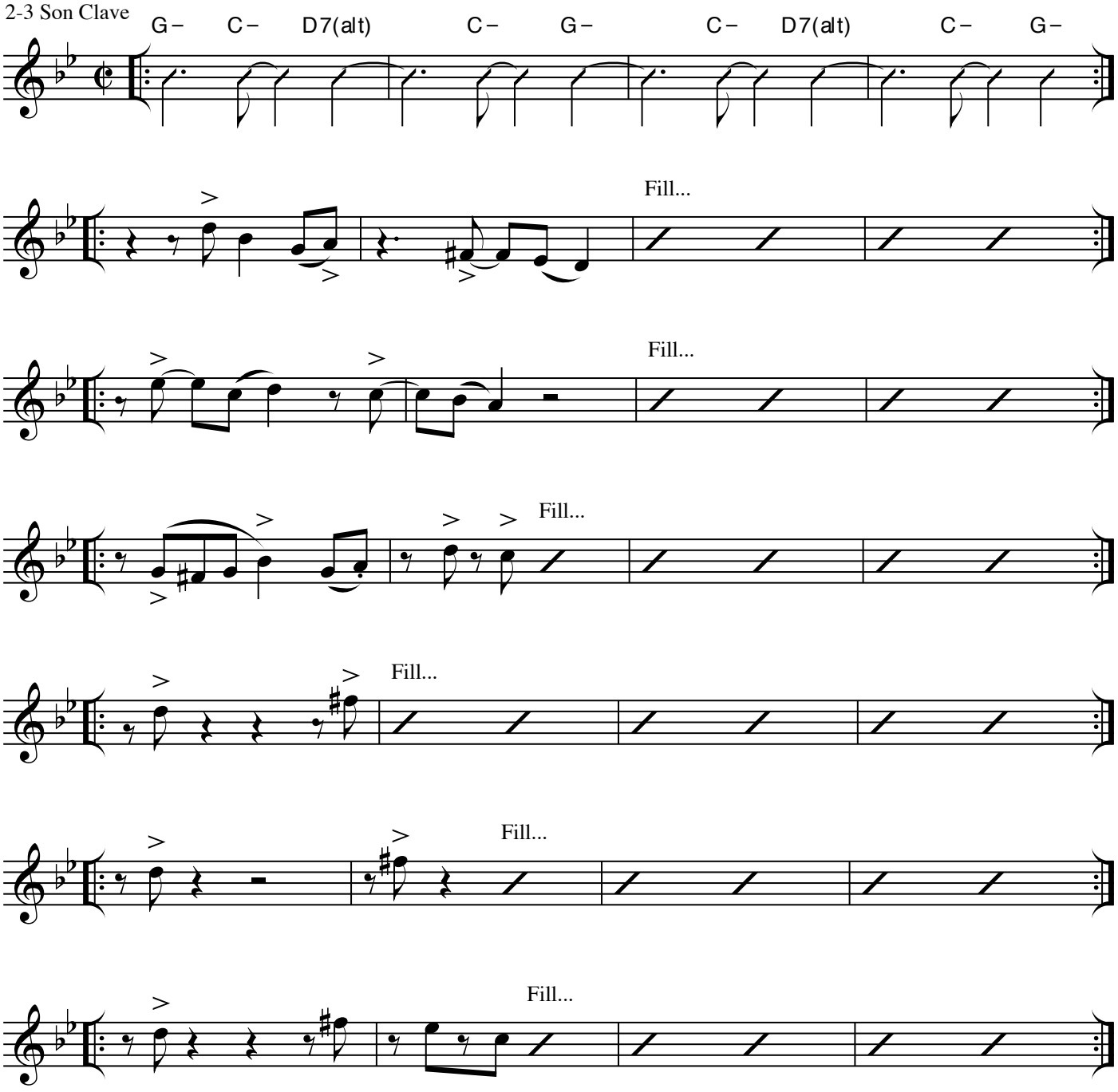
I– IV– V7(alt) IV– in G Minor

Play each phrase as written (clapping clave). Then listen to the rhythm section on the last two measures of each 4-measure phrase. Fill using your own ideas. Then repeat.



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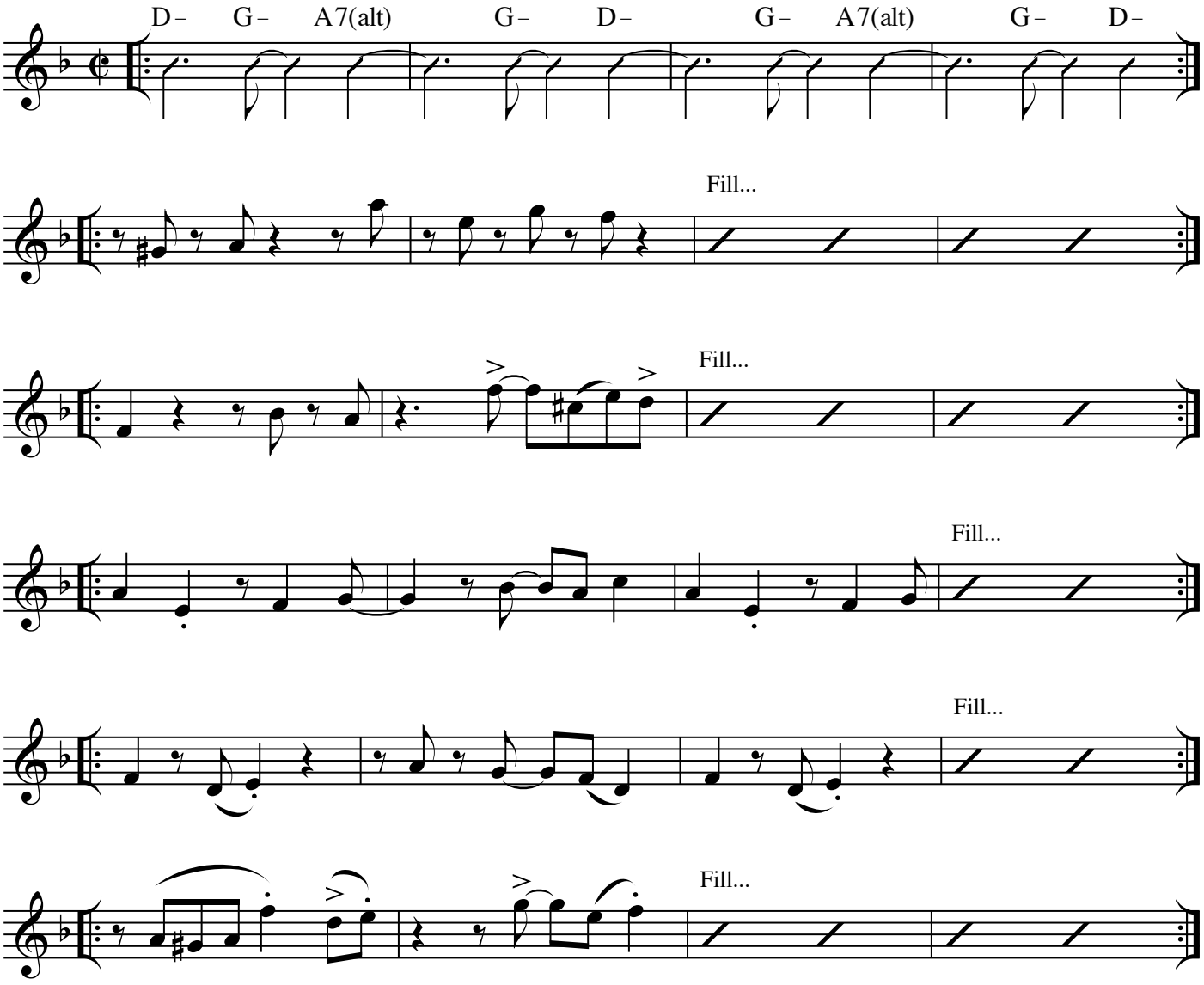
I– IV– V7(alt) IV– in D Minor

Play each phrase as written (clapping clave). Then listen to the rhythm section on the last two measures of each 4-measure phrase. Fill using your own ideas. Then repeat.

2-3 Son Clave



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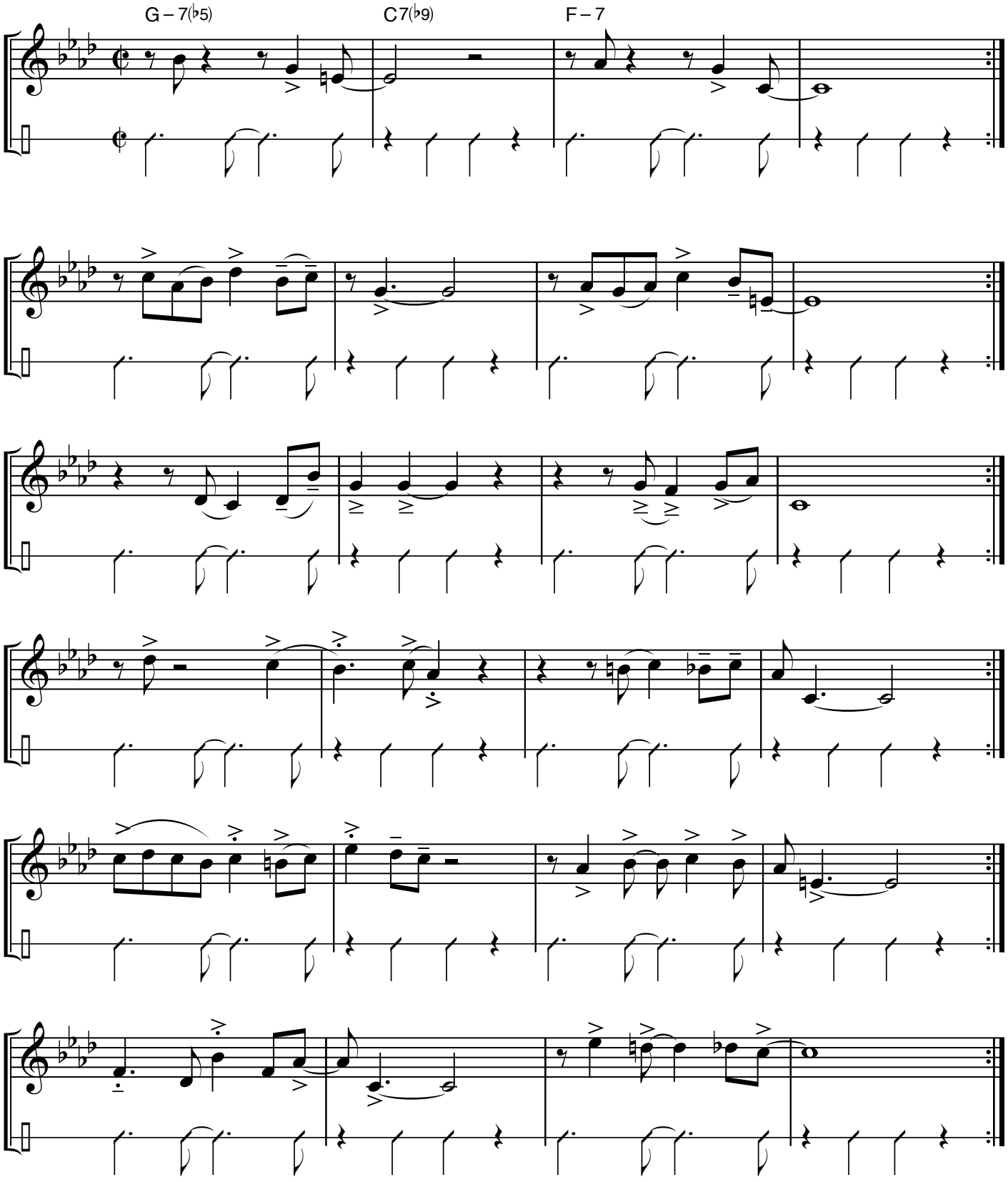
II–7(♭5) V7(♭9) I in F Minor

3-2 Rumba Clave



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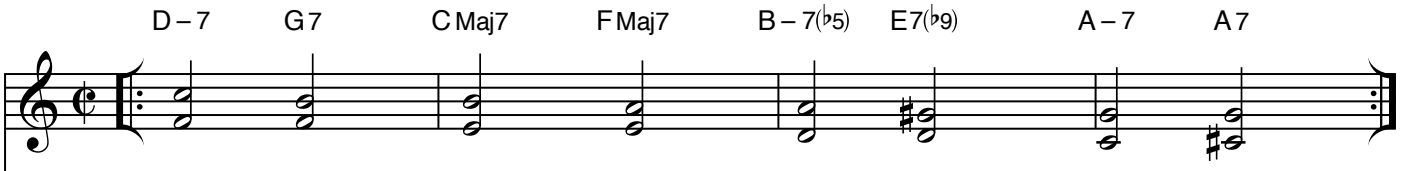
Tito-Tito

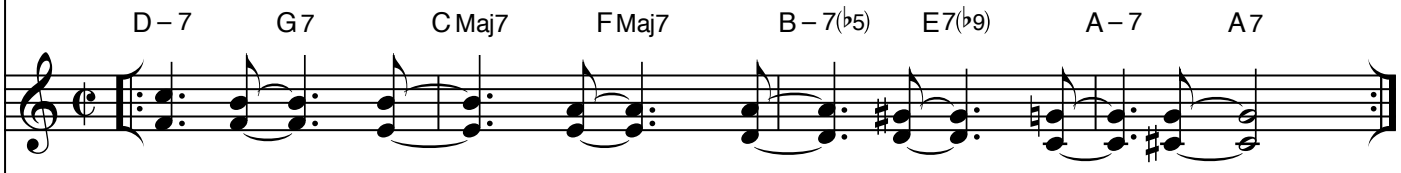
I first heard these changes in Tito Puente's arrangement of "Maria Cervantes" by Noro Morales.

When the harmony moves this fast, using one scale common to all the chords (A minor) makes the solo monotonous quickly—even more so if there is no rhythmic phrasing. One way to create melodic interest and to clearly outline the harmony is by anticipating the guide-tone lines (3rd and 7th of the chord) combined with phrases in clave.

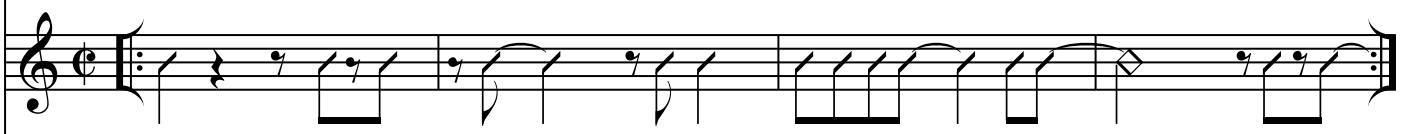
Guide Tone



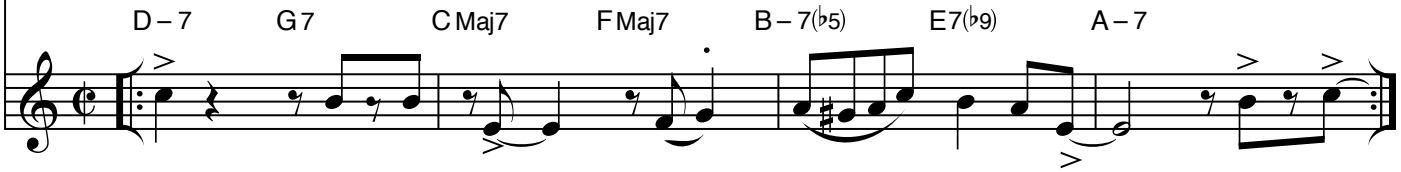
Anticipating Guide Tone



Rhythm Figure (in Clave [2-3])



Rhythmic Figure in Pitch



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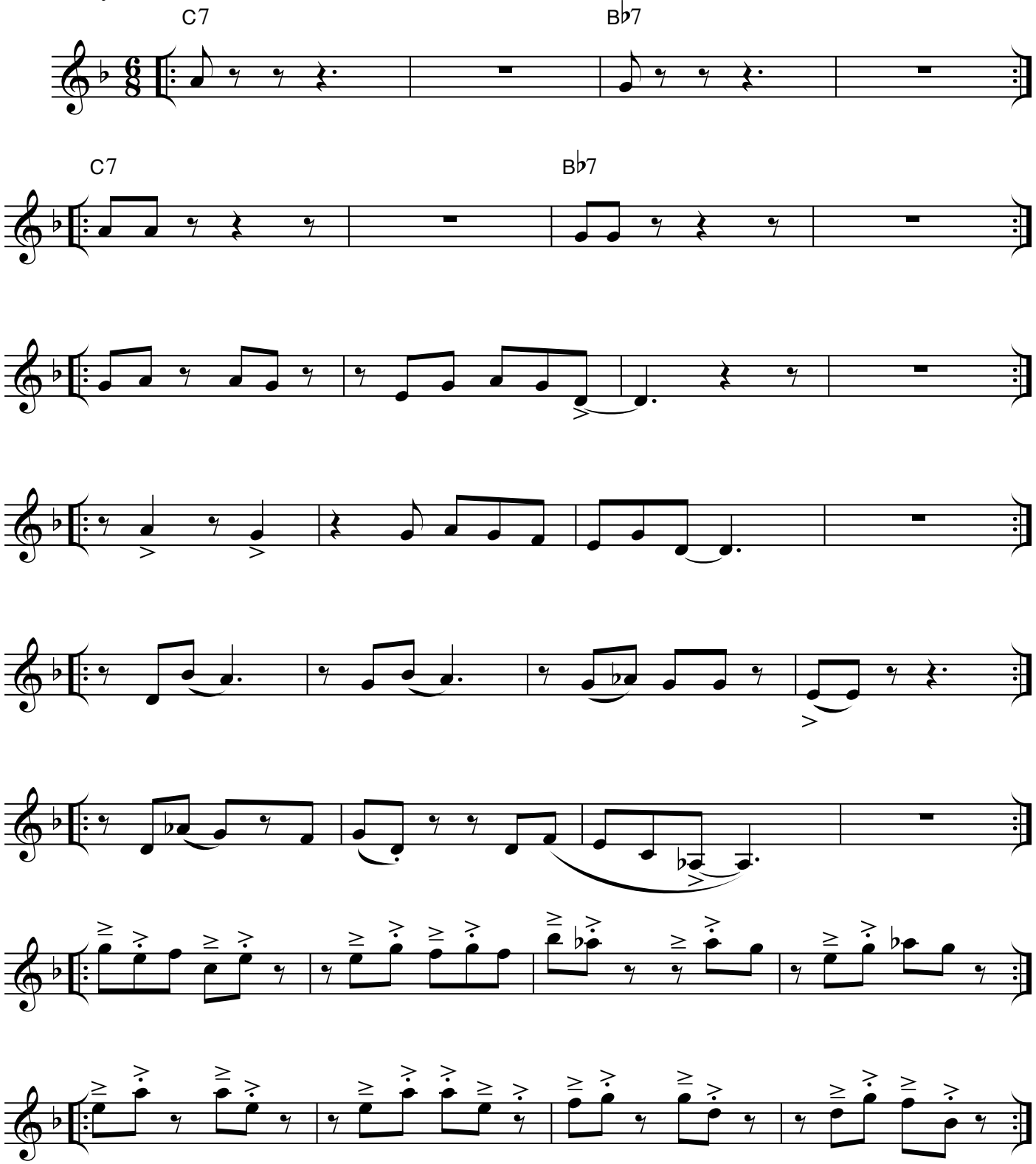
Afro-Cuban 6/8

Play with a relaxed feel, and articulate any attacks on beats 2 and 5, giving them the full value.
Play with and without accents.



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