Level Up!

A Graduated Approach to Clef Reading
inspired by George Dandelot's *Manuel pratique*

Level Up! - A Graduated Approach to Clef Reading
inspired by George Dandelot's *Manuel pratique*

"Level Up" refers to a familiar aspect of video game design. No one wants to play a game that is impossible to learn, so they tend to be organized in levels that increase in difficulty. The first level is very easy - it helps you learn the most basic concepts of a particular imaginary world, how to move around, how to score points, etc. Later levels introduce new characters, new challenges, or just faster speed and higher density of objects. As you graduate from level to level your skill level increases until you are eventually performing in ways that would have seemed unthinkable on your very first try.

Reading the notes on the clef is a kind of low-level skill similar to moving around obstacles in a video game. At first it might be tedious and awkward, but if you keep at it it will become automatic. Ideally, you want to be able to read notes as quickly and effortlessly as you are reading the words in this sentence. A graduated approach organized in levels can help you achieve this.

This idea isn't really from the video game era at all. I learned it from a very handy textbook published in 1928, George Dandelot's *Manuel pratique pour l'étude des clés*. From what I understand, Dandelot's work is still under copyright - you can buy a newly edited French version on Amazon for $15, and I once saw an English translation in the store for about $35. But why bother? Dandelot's idea was so simple (and so brilliant) that we can easily make a new version that will serve the same purpose. What follows is roughly the same as Dandelot's technique. I've changed a few details, introduced the newfangled term "levels," and generated all of my own notes.

How to use this book

I don't think you want to play or sing these exercises - they aren't very musical and aren't going to sound like much of anything. But you do want to practice recognizing the notes. Thus, I think you should "chant" the note names in a steady rhythm - just say what they are, out loud, like "A", "B", "C" and so on.

You can also write the letter names below the notes, but that only works once and then the exercise is useless. So if you are going to do that be ready to print a fresh, unmarked copy later.

Treble Clef

middle

C   G   C   G
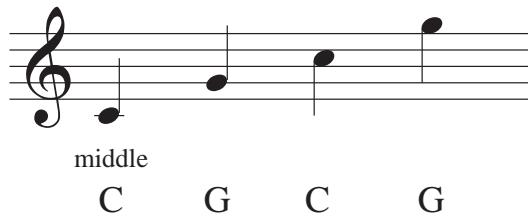
Treble Clef is also referred to as "G clef," because its curlicue shape makes circles around two different G's. To get started we are going to practice only C's and G's as our "anchor pitches."
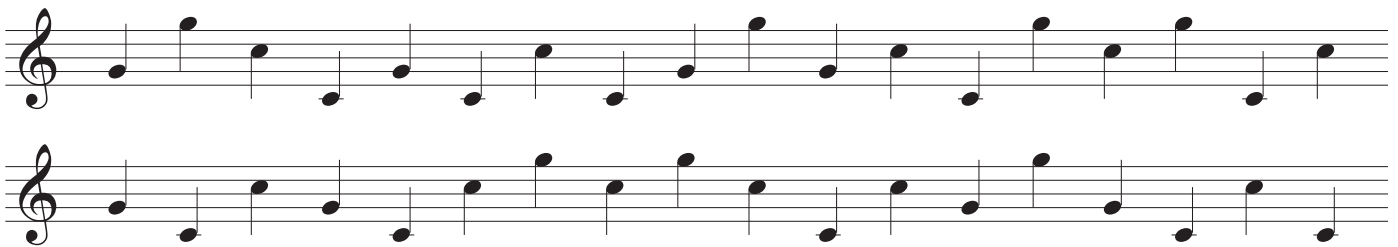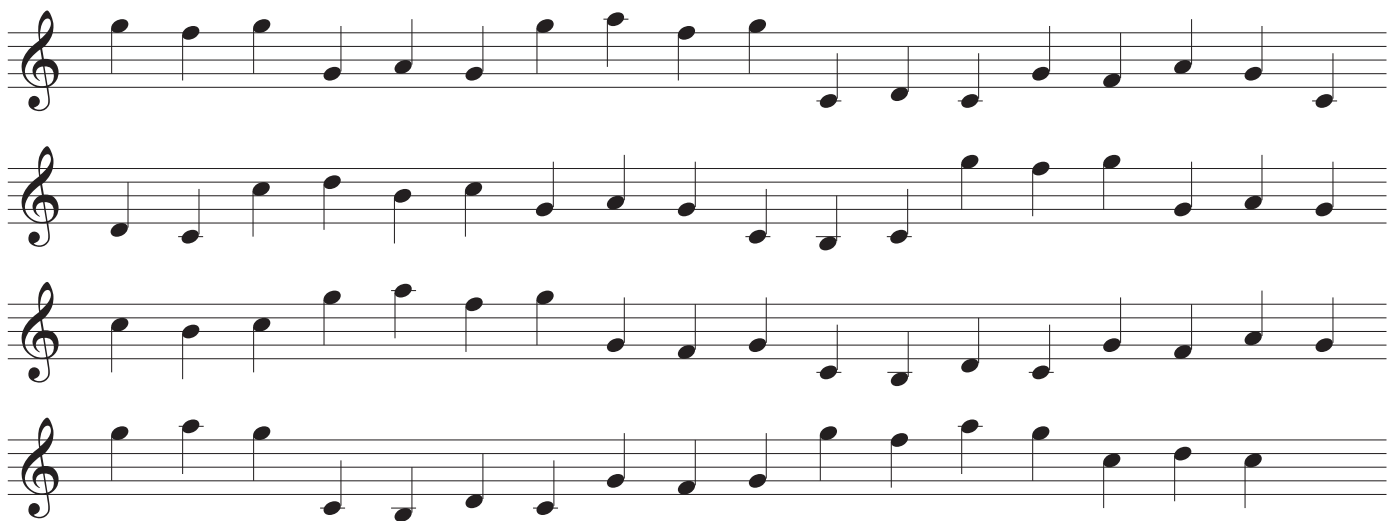
LEVEL ONE - THE ANCHOR PITCHES

LEVEL TWO - NEIGHBOR FIGURES

C B C   C D C   G F G   G A G   et cetera...

Our neighbor figures start on an anchor pitch, move away to a neighbor note, and then return.

LEVEL THREE - INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS + HIGH C

G F   G A   F G   A G

Now our neighbor notes merely precede or follow an anchor note.

PLUS we'll add a new high C, two ledger lines above the staff.

C   B   C   D
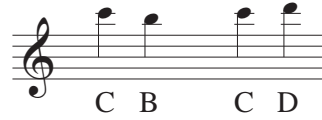
LEVEL FOUR - JUST THE NEIGHBOR NOTES, FULLY RANDOM
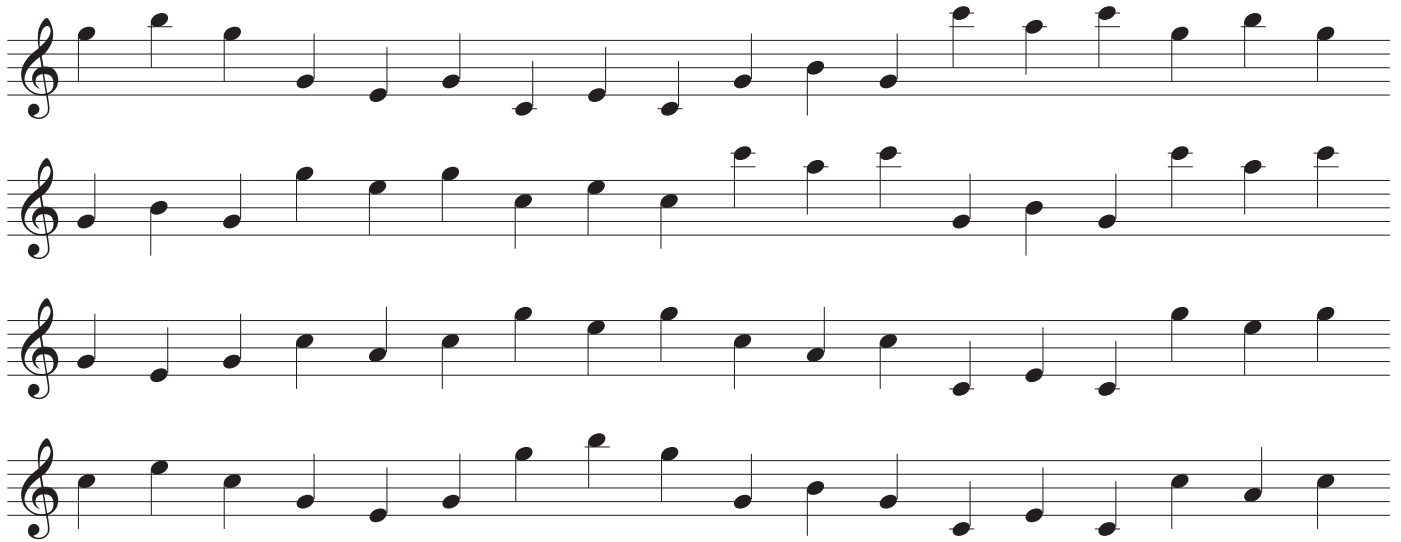
So all the notes in this level are B's, D's, F's or A's.

LEVEL FIVE - THIRD-RELATED NEIGHBOR FIGURES

C A C   C E C   G E G   G B G

Now we make the same pattern as level two, with an anchor note, nearby note, and return, but we skip by thirds instead of steps.
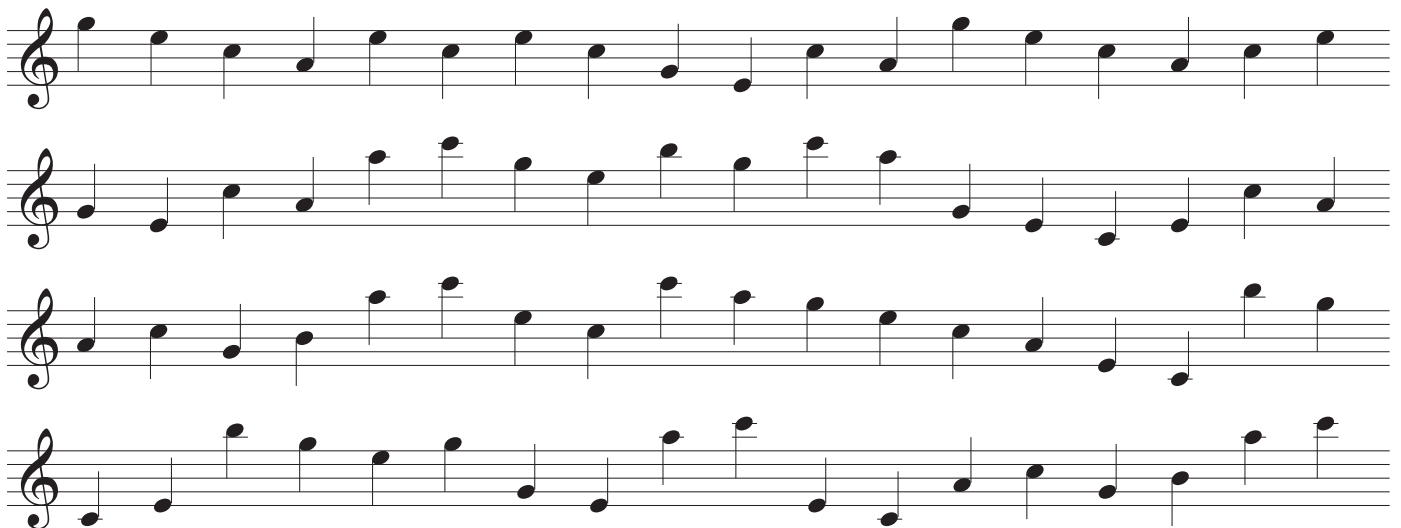
LEVEL SIX - THIRD-RELATED INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS

C A   C E   A C   E C

Third-related notes either follow or precede an anchor note.

LEVEL SEVEN - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, ONE OCTAVE

All white notes between middle C (aka C4, c´) and
the octave above (= C5, c´´).

LEVEL EIGHT - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, HIGHER OCTAVE

All white notes between C5 (or c´´) and C6 (c´´´).

LEVEL NINE - FULLY RANDOM, TWO OCTAVES

Bass Clef

middle
C   F   C   F

Bass clef places its two dots around F, so we are going to use F and C as our anchor pitches.

LEVEL ONE - THE ANCHOR PITCHES

LEVEL TWO - NEIGHBOR FIGURES

C B C F G F F E F C D C et cetera...

Once again our neighbor figures start on an anchor pitch, move away to a neighbor note, and then return.

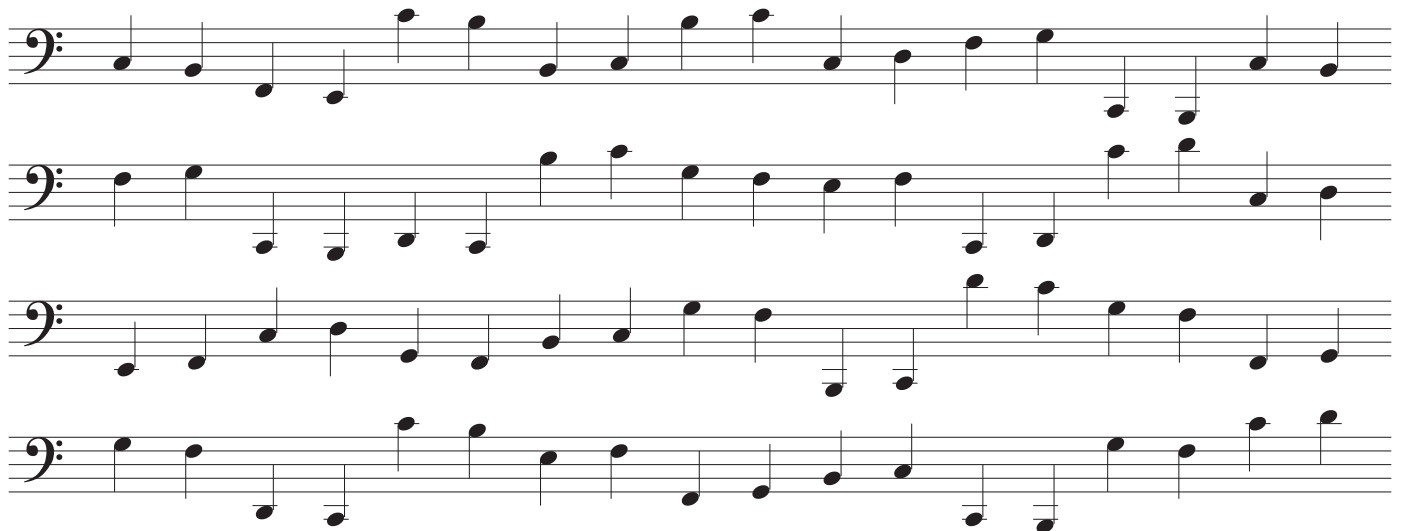## LEVEL THREE - INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS + LOW C

F E F G E F G F

Now our neighbor notes merely precede or follow an anchor note.

PLUS we'll add another C, two ledger lines below the staff.

C B C D

LEVEL FOUR - JUST THE NEIGHBOR NOTES, FULLY RANDOM

All the notes in this level are B's, D's, E's or G's.

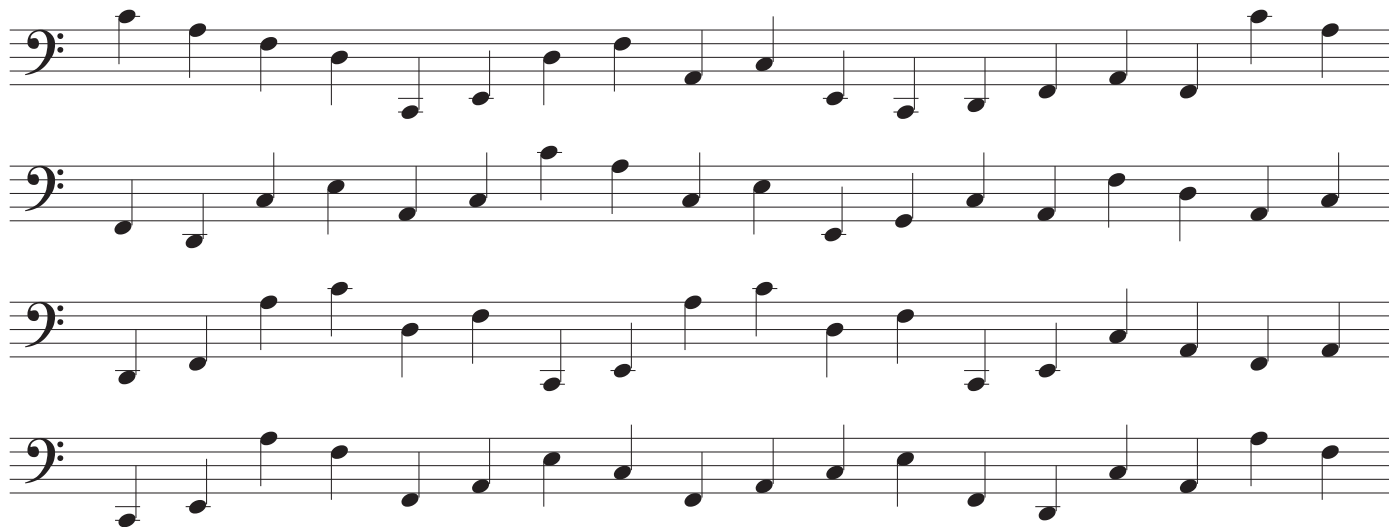## LEVEL FIVE - THIRD-RELATED NEIGHBOR FIGURES

F A F   F D F   C E C   C A C

This is the same pattern as level two, with an anchor note, nearby note, and return, but we skip by thirds instead of steps.

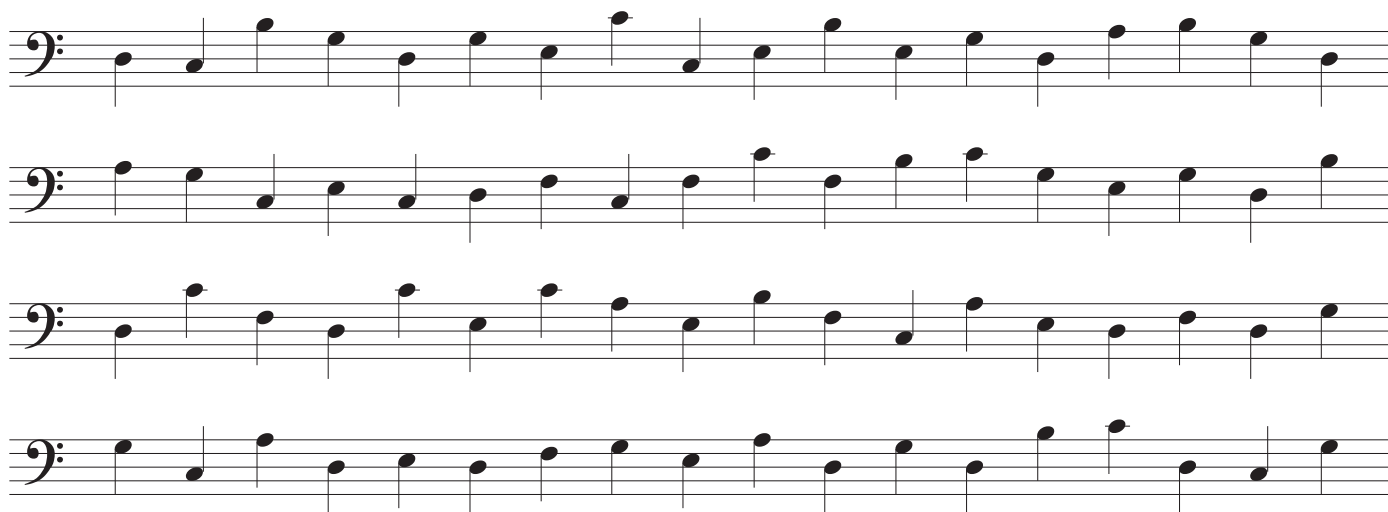## LEVEL SIX - THIRD-RELATED INCOMPLETE NEIGHBORS

Third-related notes either follow or precede an anchor note.

F A   F D   D F   A F
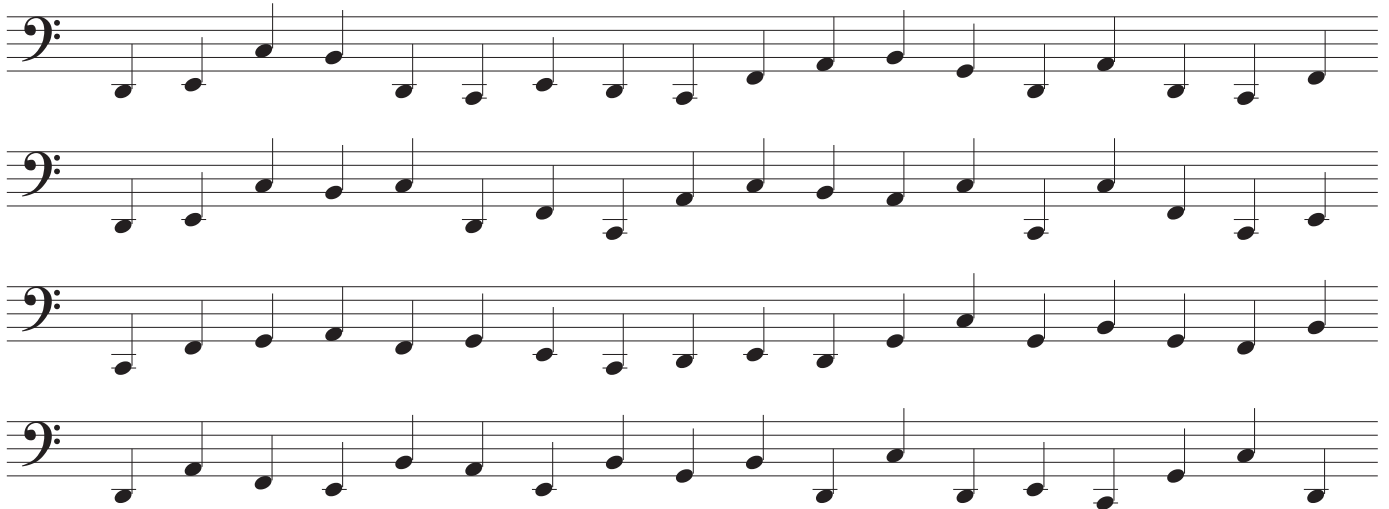
LEVEL SEVEN - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, ONE OCTAVE

All white notes between the C in the staff (also known as the "small c" or C2) and the middle C (aka C4, c´).

LEVEL EIGHT - FULLY RANDOM NOTES, LOWER OCTAVE

All white notes between the great C (C2) and the small C (C3).

LEVEL NINE - FULLY RANDOM, TWO OCTAVES