Jazz Drummer Elvin Jones: His Musical Heritage

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Table of contents

Introduction.....1

1 Elvin Jones ….....3

1.1 Defining his essentials.....…..... 3

1.1.1 Accompaniment….....3

1.1.1.a "Playing the drum set as a whole instrument"….... 3

1.1.1.b Elvin's polyrhythmic approach..... 7

1.1.1.c Elvin's dynamic range within a phrase..... 10

1.1.1.d Linear and non-linear playing..... 13

1.1.2. Drum solos..... 14

1.1.2.a Use of polyrhythmic phrases..... 14

1.1.2.b Playing the drum set as one instrument..... 17

1.1.2.c Use of a vast dynamic range..... 20

1.1.2.d Quick changes of note values within a phrase..... 22

1.2 Predecessors..... 23

1.2.1 Tiny Kahn..... 23

1.2.2 Roy Haynes..... 26

2 Elvin Jones' Legacy …..... 27

2.1 Jack Dejohnette….....27

2.1.1 Accompaniment..... 27

2.1.2 Drum Solos …..... 30

2.2 Jeff 'Tain' Watts….....32

2.2.1 Accompaniment …..... 32

2.2.2 Drum Solos …..... 36

2.3 Brian Blade …..... 37

2.3.1 Accompaniment …..... 37

2.3.2 Drum Solos….....40

3. Conclusion ….....41

4. Appendix ….....44

4.1 Elvin Jones ….....44

4.1.1 Drum Solos ….....44

4.1.2 Accompaniment.....82

4.2 Tiny Kahn.....88

4.3 Roy Haynes.....92

4.4 Jack Dejohnette.....96

4.5 Jeff 'Tain' Watts.....102

4.6 Brian Blade ….....111

5. Bibliography ….....121

5.1 Sources ….....121

5.2 Recordings.....121

5.3 Online Sources ….....121

Introduction

The American jazz drummer Elvin Jones is one of the most famous musicians in jazz history. Although he is such an important influence on almost every jazz drummer nowadays, his concepts and ideas are often misinterpreted.
Expressions such as "you have to play the drum set as a whole instrument" or "Elvin's polyrhytmical approach" are familiar to most jazz drummers, but it is hard to find a satisfying explanation for their actual meaning.
Elvin has always been a very intriguing musician to me, but it was not until the beginning of my master studies that I started to deal in depth with his musical legacy. I would like to thank my teacher Eric Ineke for encouraging me in my ambition to figure out one of music's most important legends.
My first step of this process was to become familiar with the material and to gain an understanding of what Elvin was doing throughout his life. I therefore transcribed drum solos and comping examples starting from the first available recordings of his life (Tommy Flanagan - Overseas 1957) to arguably his peak during the John Coltrane Quartet era in the 1960s, finishing with transcriptions from the late 1980s and 1990s with his own band, Elvin Jones' Jazz Machine. The basis of my research therefore consists of 21 transcriptions with 43 written pages. All of them are added in full in the appendix. Although I do not specifically refer to every single one of them, it is nevertheless the most important part of this work and therefore has to be a part of this research paper. I did not use any software in order to slow down music for transcribing because I believe it affects the perception of phrases and can be misleading.
As I said in the beginning, it is very difficult to find satisfying work on this topic because people who have done research have used only one of these two methods extensively:

1. Interviews
2. Studying his music

Although Frank Kofsky, for example, uses both approaches in his "*Black Nationalism*

and the Revolution in Music (1971) "; expanded and revised as "*John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s (1998)*"[1]

it is his lack of ability to play the drums that makes his research findings nevertheless unsatisfying, speaking from a jazz drummer's perspective.

Although Elvin Jones was a one of a kind musician and a pioneer in his field, I tried to find examples of other drummers who used certain methods before he did. I will therefore discuss the two jazz drummers, Tiny Kahn and Roy Haynes.

The polyrhythmic aspect of his playing which drummers often refer to as one of his trademarks also requires some explanation.

The second part of this research, called "Elvin Jones' Legacy", deals with three unique and very influential drummers in their own right who adopted some of his ideas and combined them with other ideas in order to create their own styles. These drummers are Jack Dejohnette (born in 1942)[2], Jeff 'Tain' Watts (born in 1960)[3] and Brian Blade (born in 1970)[4]. One of the reasons I picked these three was that each of them is a prime example of a different generation of jazz drummers. Another reason why I chose to include post-Elvin drummers in my research was because I wanted to know in what way other drummers applied his concepts, in order to get an awareness of different possibilities that are available for my own development.

I analysed transcriptions from these drummers under the aspects of Elvin's essentials which I defined earlier in my first chapter.

Altogether, I completed 78 pages of transcriptions for my thesis, all included in the appendix.

This research has helped me to understand Elvin Jones' basic ideas and his way of thinking. I would like to use a metaphor to explain my progress. Our brain, with all our knowledge, is like a large library containing thousands of books. Before this research the ones dealing with Elvin were not labelled and I did not know where to look them up.

But now they are, and whenever I feel the urgency to play like him I can go straight to the bookshelf and get what I need.

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1 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Kofsky, 10.12.2015, 11:54
2 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_DeJohnette, 10.12.2015, 12:08
3 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_%22Tain%22_Watts, 10.12.2015, 12:09
4 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Blade, 10.12.2015, 12:10

1.) Elvin Jones

Elvin Ray Jones was born on the 9th of September 1927 in Pontiac, Michigan, USA and died on 18th May 2004 at the age of 76.
After a short stint in the United States Army in the late 1940s, he emerged as one of the leading drummers in the Detroit music scene and had the chance to play with jazz legends such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Sonny Stitt.
In the mid 50's he moved to New York City and worked as a freelance jazz musician.
He joined the 'classic' John Coltrane Quartet in 1960 and was part of that group for six years. After that time, he started focusing more on his role as a leader in his own bands.[5]

1.1) Defining his essentials

In this part I will give you an overview of Elvin's major contributions to playing the drum set in a jazz context.
First, we must distinguish between two separate parts:

1. accompaniment - his role as part of the rhythm section behind a soloist
2. drum solos – his way of expressing himself in a solo spot

1.1.1) Accompaniment

1.1.1.a) "Playing the drum set as a whole instrument"

"It is one instrument, and I would hasten to say that I take that as the basis for my whole approach to the drums. It is a single musical instrument of several components." [6]

5 Comp. http://www.elvinjones.net/biography/ 31.1.2016, 18:24
6 Comp. *modern drummer magazine, December 1982, page 39*

It is common knowledge among jazz drummers that Elvin Jones always referred to playing the whole drum set as a single instrument, but from my experience, there is a lot of confusion out there what he actually meant. He never gave a deeper insight to what specific drum patterns or musical ideas this statement refers to. In general, he was very vague when asked about drum techniques or anything drum related, and he often liked to refer to something more philosophical about how certain experiences influenced his playing.
For example, when he was asked in the December 1982 issue of the *Modern Drummer Magazine* to talk about the drummers he was influenced by he answered as follows:

"*To me, 'influenced' means 'encouraged' in some way. It doesn't necessarily follow that you have to adapt that person's style, or that person's habits, or whatever. It's simply that this particular individual – or those people or that group – inspired you … And it doesn't have to be a musician – it can be your mother. In my case it certainly is. Also my father.*" [7]
From my point of view, that is probably one of the reasons why it is so hard to get to the essence of his style - he was not really a great help in giving precise answers himself.
As Barry W Elmes correctly claims in his research 'Elvin Jones – Defining his essential contributions to jazz', the cymbal is the main focal point of his playing.[8] It is a rather obvious observation if you take into consideration that it is by far the most dominant piece of the drum set in his playing in terms of volume. This approach historically follows the tradition of the drummers of the Bebop era [9] where the standard swing cymbal beat, 2 and 4 on the Hihat and 4 on the floor on the bass drum[10] were the most important characteristics of playing the drum set within this style.

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7 Comp. *modern drummer magazine, december 1982, page 36*
8 Comp. Elmes, Barry W, Elvin Jones – Defining his essential contributions to Jazz, p. 46
9 Bebop or bop is a style of jazz characterized by a fast tempo, instrumental virtuosity, and improvisation based on a combination of harmonic structure and occasional references to the melody. It was developed in the early and mid-1940s.
10 You feather a bass drum by striking it very lightly with your bass drum beater on all the quarter notes. This technique is most commonly used in jazz swing drumming, although not exclusively.

What Elvin changed was, in order to establish continuity within his groove, that he no longer relied on these stable fixed patterns.

"*I always try to sustain some kind of continuity with the cymbal. That's where the consistency really is, because we no longer use a strong 4/4 bass beat, or that rigid, up-and-down, 2 and 4 on the hi-hat. So the emphasis is on the consistency of the tempo and, of course, on the continuity of that cymbal.*"[11]

When you take the role of the ride cymbal as a given, you can see that Elvin constructs his phrases with simple ideas played on this part of the instrument. All the other pieces of the drum set he uses therefore function as colours in order to support the basic phrase.
As a result, the phrase itself consists of several layers of notes and dynamic levels. I will deal with his dynamics more specifically later.
To sum it up, when Elvin Jones refers to playing the drum set as a single instrument he is talking about playing one phrase at a time with the whole drum set. The basic melody is played with the ride cymbal, with hits on snare, toms, hi-hat and bass drum supporting it.
To make it clear, I would like you to look at the following transcription of the track 'Resolution' from the recording 'A love supreme' by the John Coltrane Quartet, released by Impulse Records in 1965.[12]
The tempo of this tune is approximately 175 bpm and would be labelled as a medium up swing.[13]
As noted, the transcription starts at 1:48 min of the song.

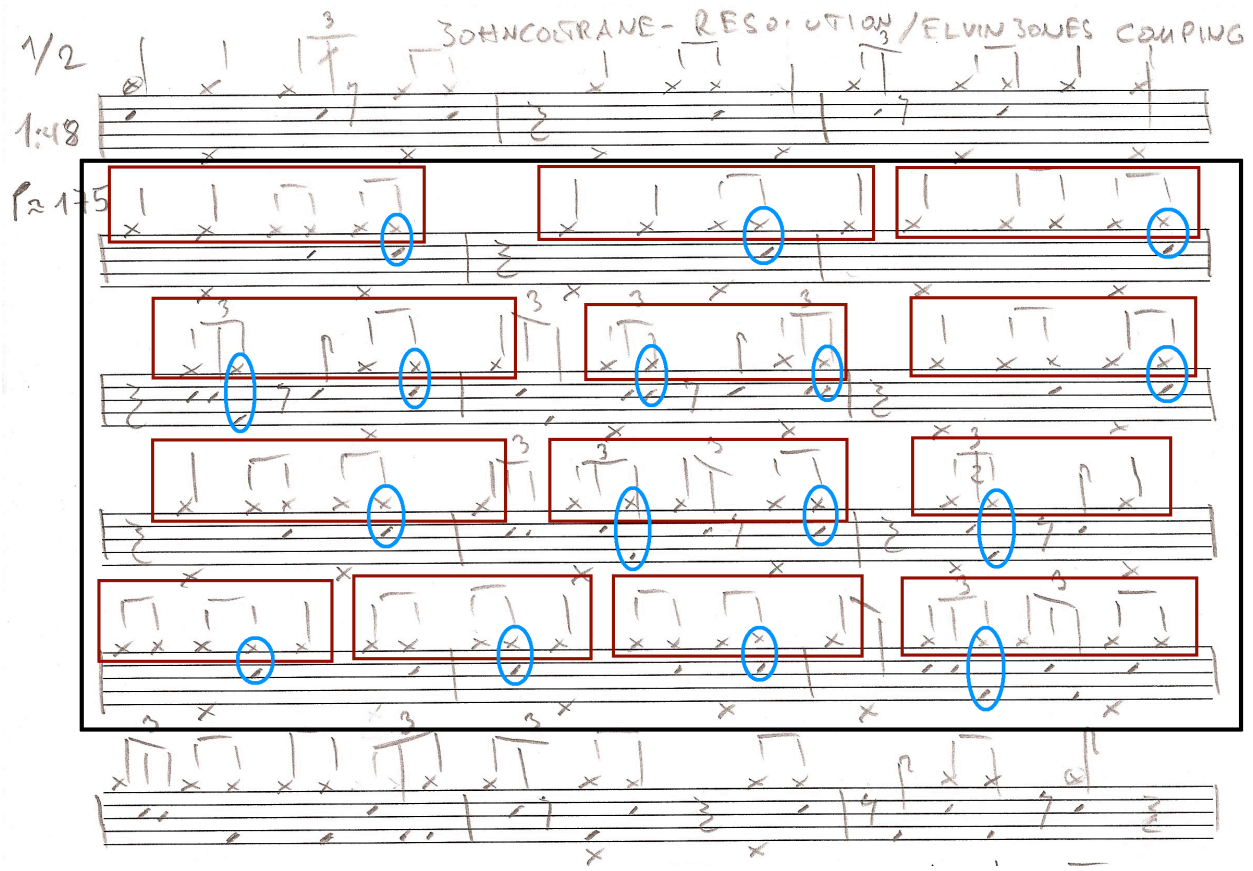
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11 Comp. Kahn, A , A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album, New York: Penguin Books (2003), p.101

12 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Love_Supreme, 11.12.2015, 17:42

13 Fast Swing: (264, 276, 288, 304, 320, 336, ...)
Up Swing: (208, 216, 224, 232, 240, 252)
Medium Up Swing: (160, 168, 176, 184, 192, 200)
Medium Swing: (120, 126, 132, 138, 144, 152)
Moderate Swing: (104, 108, 112, 116)
Slow Swing: (88, 92, 96, 100)

Transcription 1[14]



Let's have a look at the area marked black. The red marks are the various cymbal phrases. Blue highlights the accents or so-called landing points of the ideas. As you can see, the notes circled blue are always supported by an additional accent on the bass drum or snare drum. The other notes function as a build-up or to thicken the phrase by adding another layer. Their dynamic range is limited to piano.

14 All the examples in this research are transcriptions made by myself.

1.1.1.b) Elvin's polyrhythmic approach

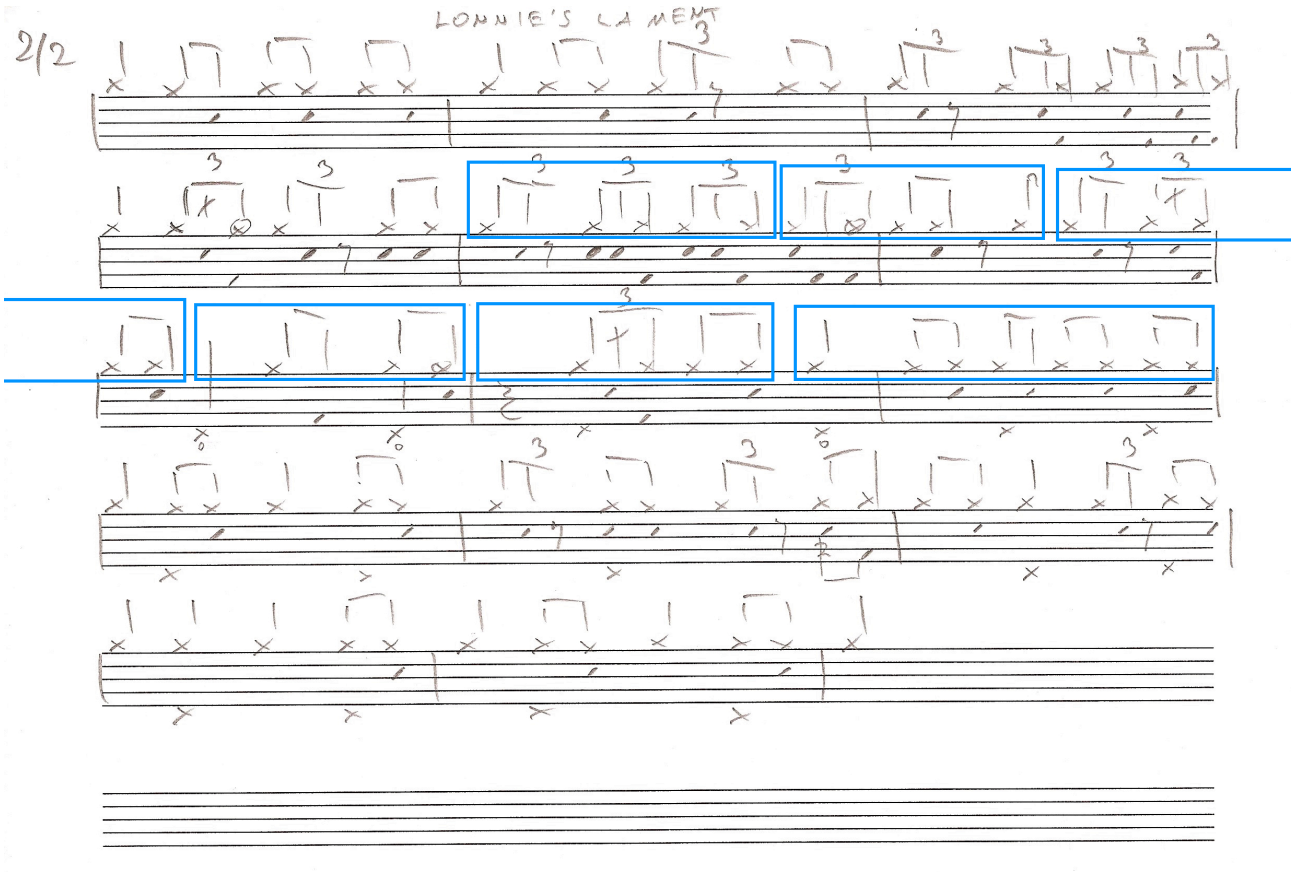
„Polyrhythm is the simultaneous use of two or more conflicting rhythms, that are not readily perceived as deriving from one another, or as simple manifestations of the same meter.“[15]

In this point I would like to talk and explain Elvin's approach to polyrhythmics. There might be some confusion about its meaning. According to definition quoted above, polyrhythms are different rhythms going on at the same time.
But, referring to the drum set, there are two different kinds of polyrhythms. We have to differentiate between polyrhythms within the drum set and within the music overall.
In Afro-Latin music, the drummer has to play different voices on the instrument simultaneously which were originally played by several instruments. The drum set itself was invented in the early 20th century and is considered to be a modern instrument.[16] You could therefore see it as an optimisation and a saving in personnel.

Elvin, on the other hand, as I determined in my previous point, plays the drum set as one instrument which is exactly the opposite to playing different rhythms at the same time.
The polyrhythms happen between the relationship of his phrases to the meter of the tune and the music itself and to the other band members.
The transcription below is of 'Lonnie's lament' from John Coltrane's recording 'Crescent', released by Impulse in 1964. Its bpm is 100 and I would categorise it as a slow swing.[17]

15 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polyrhythm, 11.12.2015, 19:21
16 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum_kit, 11.12.2015, 19:44
17 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crescent_%28John_Coltrane_album%29, 11.12.2015, 20:02

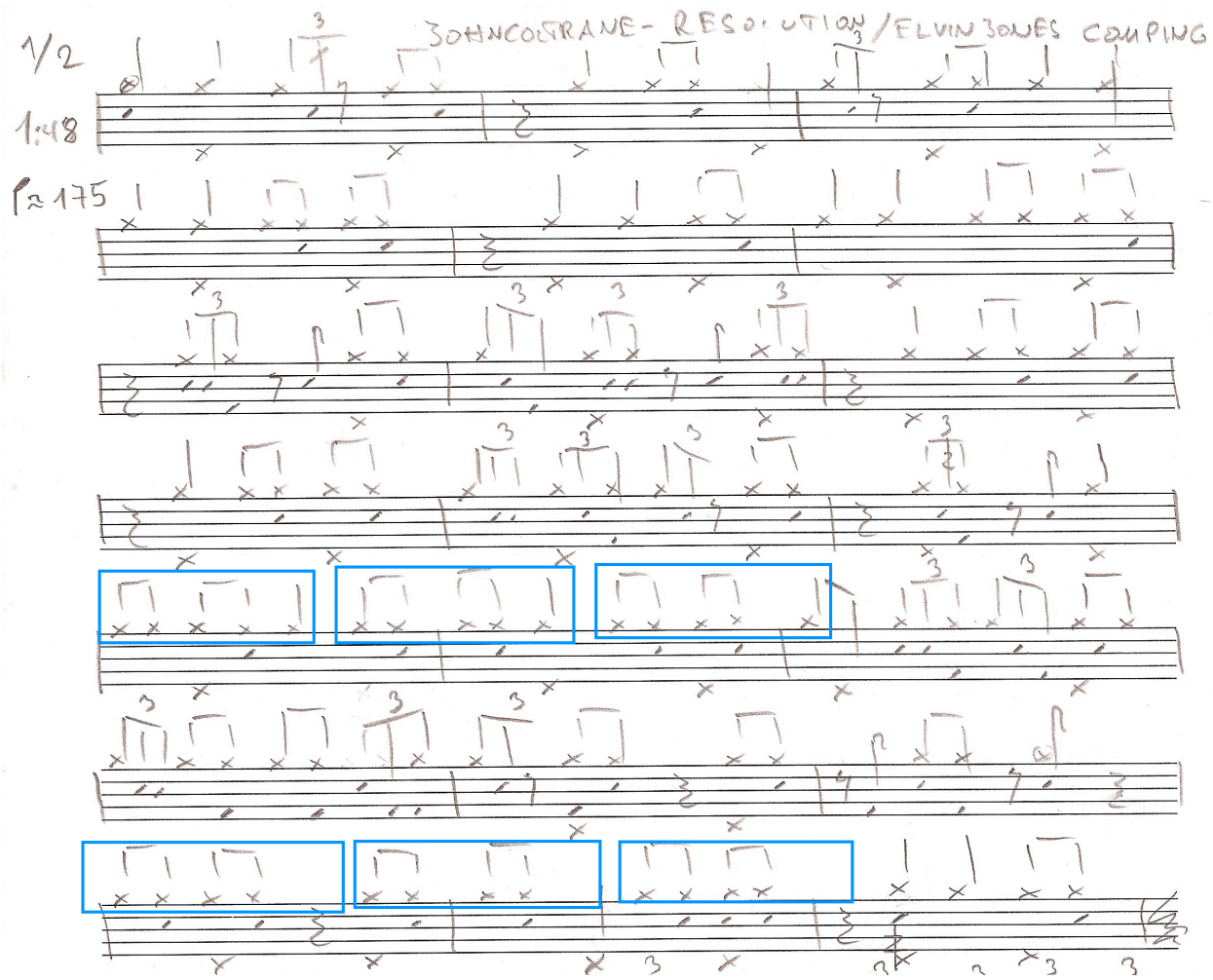
Transcription 2



As you can see, the first five of the phrases marked blue have a length of three quarter notes, whereas the last one counts five. He actually plays a 3/4 phrase on top of the 4/4 meter. These groupings of 3/4 phrases can be found throughout his life on different recordings and different tempos too.

If we look at the first transcription again, I have highlighted two spots where he plays polyrhythmic 3/4 phrases in a different tempo.

Transcription 3



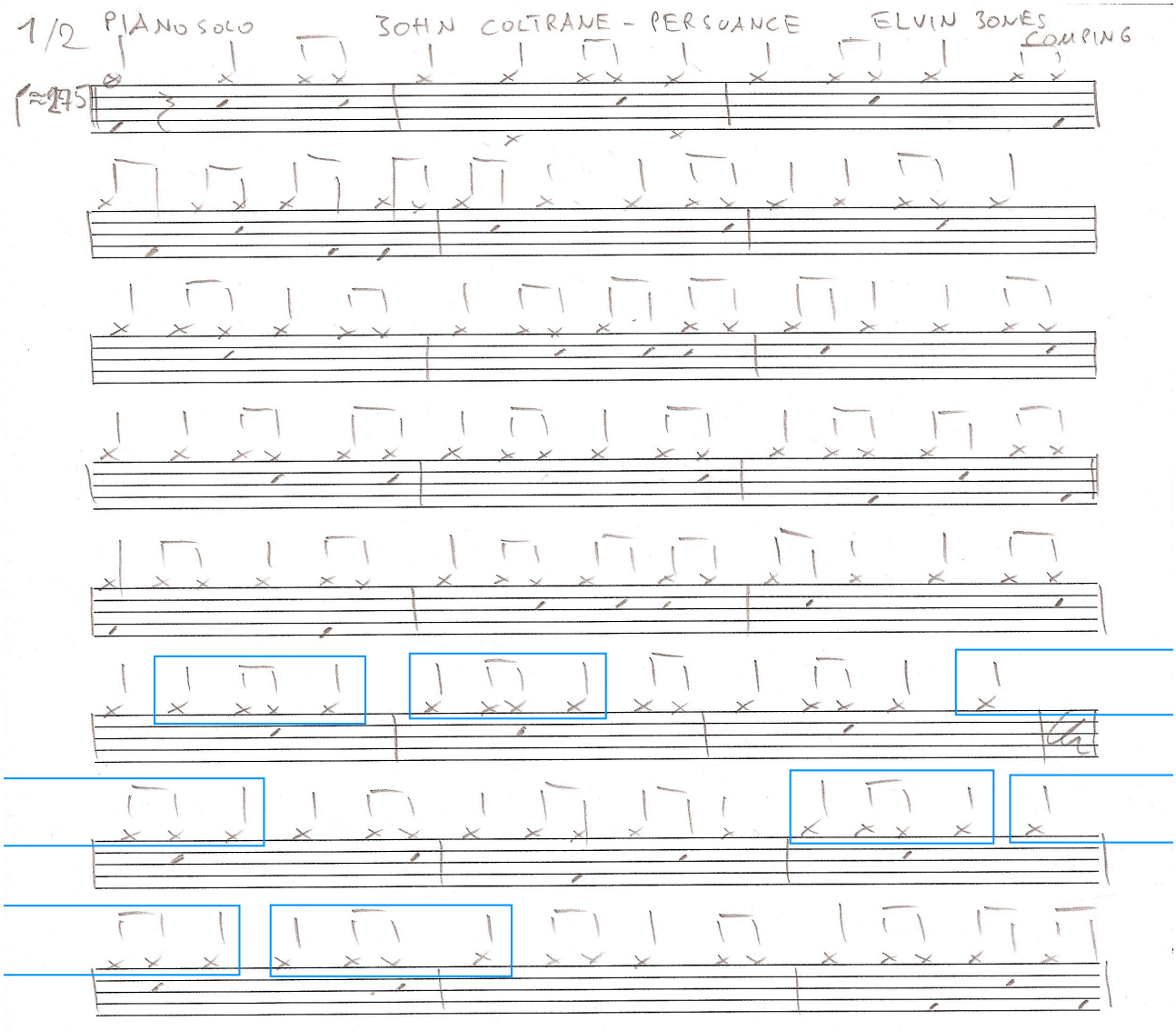
This transcription is of 'Pursuance' from John Coltrane's 'A love supreme', released by Impulse Records in 1965.[18]

The tempo is approximately 275 bpm and I would categorise it as a fast swing.

Again the areas marked blue show Elvin's polyrhythmic phrases.

18 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Love_Supreme, 11.12.2015, 17:42

Transcription 4

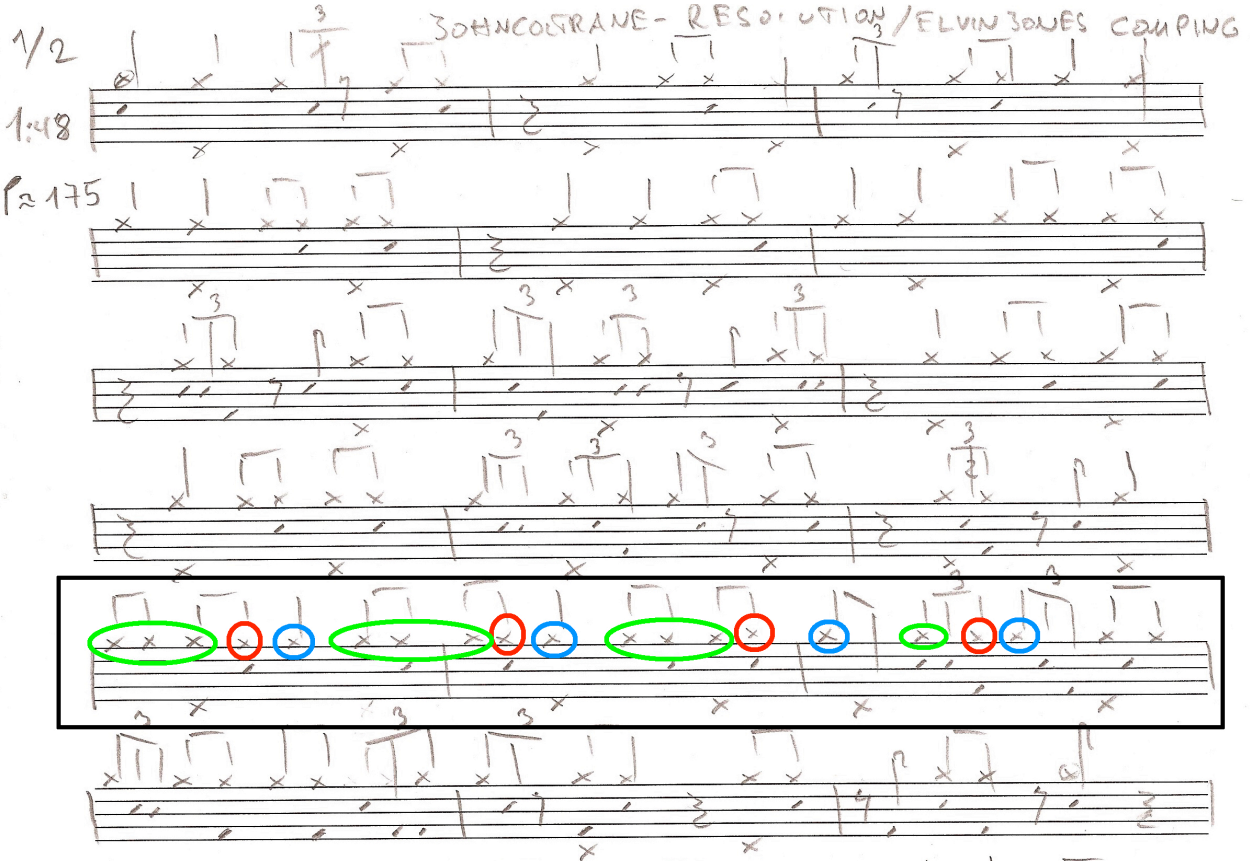


1.1.1.c) Elvin's dynamic range within a phrase

One of his trademarks is the vast dynamic range he employed in his playing. This is a result of his new approach of playing the drum set as one instrument. Because he started playing variable melodic ideas on his cymbal, he was able to employ more dynamic variations in his cymbal beat compared to fellow drummers such as Philly Joe Jones or Billy Higgins.

I would like you to have a look again on the following transcription of 'Resolution'.

Transcription 5

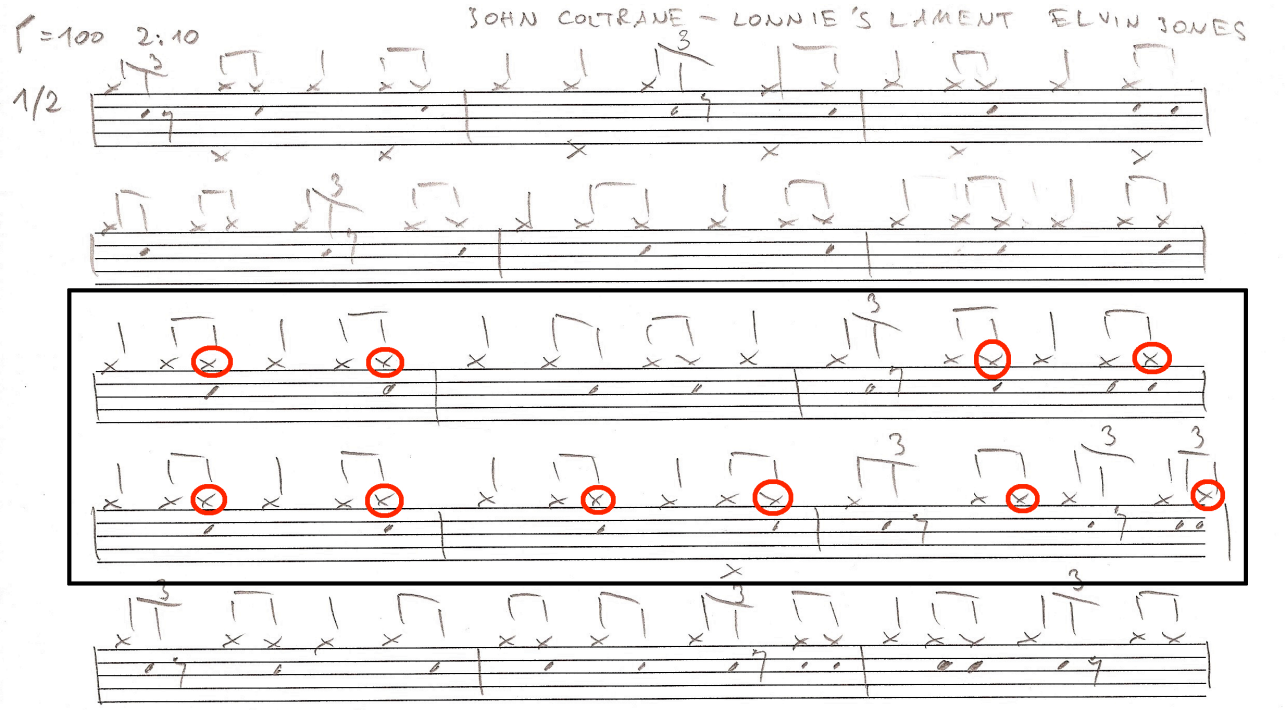


This time I chose to have a closer look at one of his polyrhythmic 3/4 phrases. As you can see, the notes marked red are the f - ff accents. In this example, all of the accents are on an off beat of the phrase and are followed by a soft tap on the next quarter beat. These notes circled in blue are in a p – pp as they are almost not noticeable. The notes circled in green function as a third level in between. That is the dynamic range other drummers usually used at that time. These notes themselves possess a dynamic structure from mp to mf.

As I mentioned before, most of the time his accents are played on an off beat of the phrase.
In general, he put more emphasis on the so-called skip note[19] than on two and four.
I would like you to have a look at the transcription of 'Lonnie's lament' again.

19 The „Skip note“ is the 2+ and 4+ in the standard cymbal swing pattern.

Transcription 6



The notes highlighted in red are the accented skip notes. An interesting effect of this concept is that this accented note in connection with a soft tap barely noticeable on the following quarter note creates a very broad phrasing that does not sound edgy, but is still hard swinging.

If you observe the piano comping accents of McCoy Tyner you can notice the similarity between the drums and the piano.

McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass and Elvin Jones on drums formed a strong bond during their time with the John Coltrane Quartet which is reflected in the musical communication between them. The phrases played by Elvin and McCoy complement each other in a perfect way as both players tend to have the same landing points in 2+ and 4+.

Unfortunately it is no longer possible to interview Elvin as he died in 2004.[20] It would be interesting to ask him whether this concept of accenting the skip note of the cymbal beat was inspired by McCoy's way of comping or the other way round.

20 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elvin_Jones, 12.12.2015, 11:26

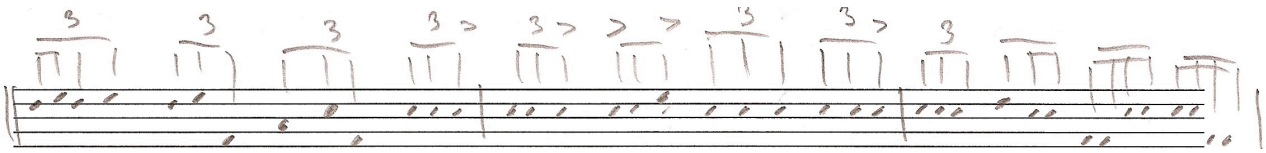
1.1.1.d) Linear and non-linear playing

In this point I am not directly dealing with a separate aspect of his style, but this is a short digression concerning the terms of linear and non-linear playing.

"*In common usage, linearity refers to a mathematical relationship or function that can be graphically represented as a straight line, as in two quantities that are directly proportional to each other, such as voltage and current in an RLC circuit, or the mass and weight of an object.*"[21]

Nowadays, when we talk about linear playing in the context of the drum set we are referring to long phrases where each note is played after the other as in the following example. As you can see, there is no overlapping of notes played at the same time.

Transcription 7



This is from a soloist's point of view and is not directly adaptable to accompaniment, as there are usually more notes played at the same time.
When we look back at the definition of linearity, it states: "two quantities that are directly proportional to each other".
My interpretation of linear and non-linear in the context of playing the drum set therefore would be as follows: in a linear approach the different parts of the instrument such as cymbals, snare drum, bass drum, etc. each have the possibility to be the leading voice. In this case the other parts, as per the definition of linearity, would play a secondary role. Therefore the hierarchy within the drum set

21 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linearity, 12.12.2015, 11:55

is flexible, but there is always some sort of linear causality to it.
However, in Elvin's non-linear approach the hierarchy is fixed because of the above-mentioned 'playing the drum set as one instrument', and the main focus of the drum set is on the ride cymbal. Other parts of the instrument have the possibility to gain focus, but almost never get on top of the cymbal.
Another possible interpretation would be in the area of dynamics. As Elvin Jones' cymbal beat as mentioned above consists of such a wide dynamic range it could be referred to as non-linear. It does not appear like a straight line, it is more like a winding graph.

1.1.2.) Drum solos

What really set Elvin Jones apart from other drummers in his time is that he was able to create an enormous amount of tension and release by playing phrases in a certain way.
These concepts can be found in his accompaniment style as well, however he interprets some of them differently:

1.) usage of polyrhythmic structures
2.) playing the drum set as one instrument
3.) employing a vast dynamic range

In addition to these three points he also mixes 16th notes and triplets within a phrase. With this method he is able to create tension and release by giving the illusion of speeding up or slowing down within a musical idea.

1.1.2.a) Use of polyrhythmic phrases

As I explained earlier, Elvin's approach to polyrhythm lies in the correlation between the phrase and the meter of the tune.
In the following transcription of 'The long two four' from Pepper Adam's '10 to 4 at the 5 Spot', released by Riverside in 1958, I have highlighted several examples of

polyrhythmic phrases.[22] It is interesting to note that this is one of Elvin's first recordings which is still available. His playing already contains some of the basic ideas which he later on developed further during his time with the John Coltrane Quartet to create his own unique voice.

The short phrases marked red consist of three eighth notes whereas the longer ones have a length of three quarter notes, as in his accompaniment style the use of 3/4 over a 4/4 meter is a very important idea.

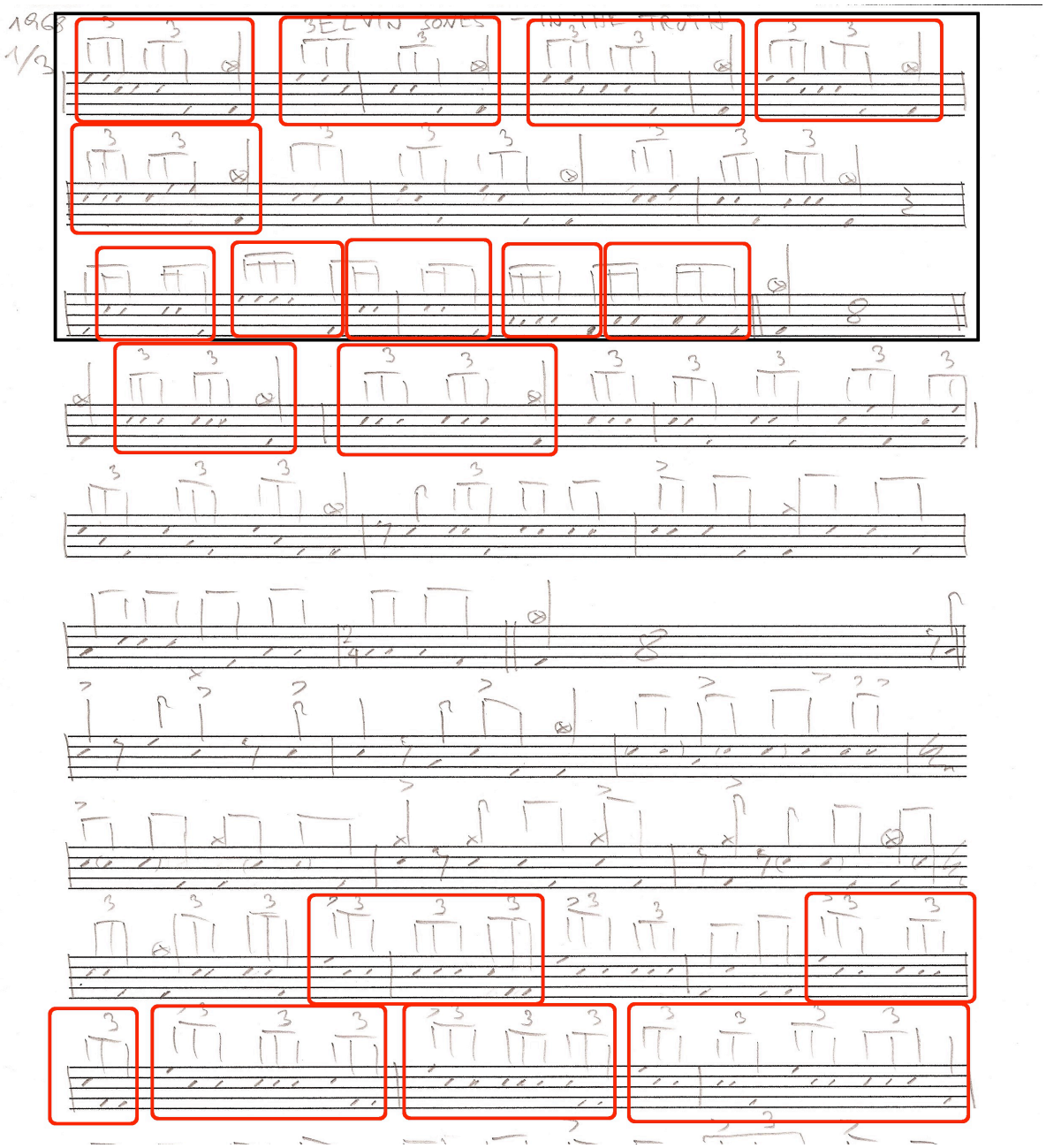
Transcription 8



22 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/10_to_4_at_the_5_Spot, 3.2.2016, 11:06

After having fully developed his style during his time with the John Coltrane Quartet, it is noticeable that he uses polyrhythmic phrases more extensively. In the following transcription of 'In the truth' from Elvin Jones' recording 'The Ultimate', released by Blue Note in 1969, I have again highlighted his polyrhythmic phrases.[23]

Transcription 9



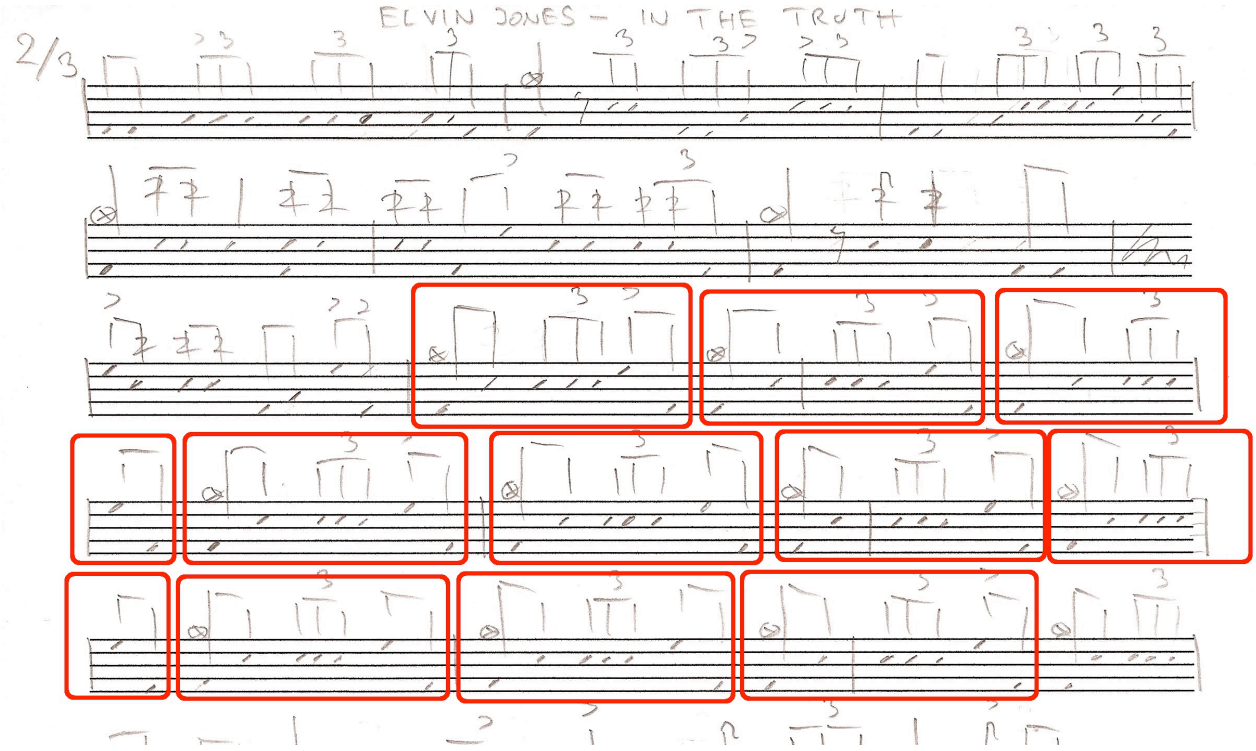
As you can see, the density of 3/4 ideas is much higher than in the transcription

23 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ultimate_%28Elvin_Jones_album%29, 13.12.2015, 11:34

above.

The last phrase marked red is actually a five beat idea which is subdivided into two and three. If you take a look at the second page of the solo transcription of 'In the truth', you can see that even the length of these phrases becomes longer as the highlighted example lasts for eight bars.

Transcription 10



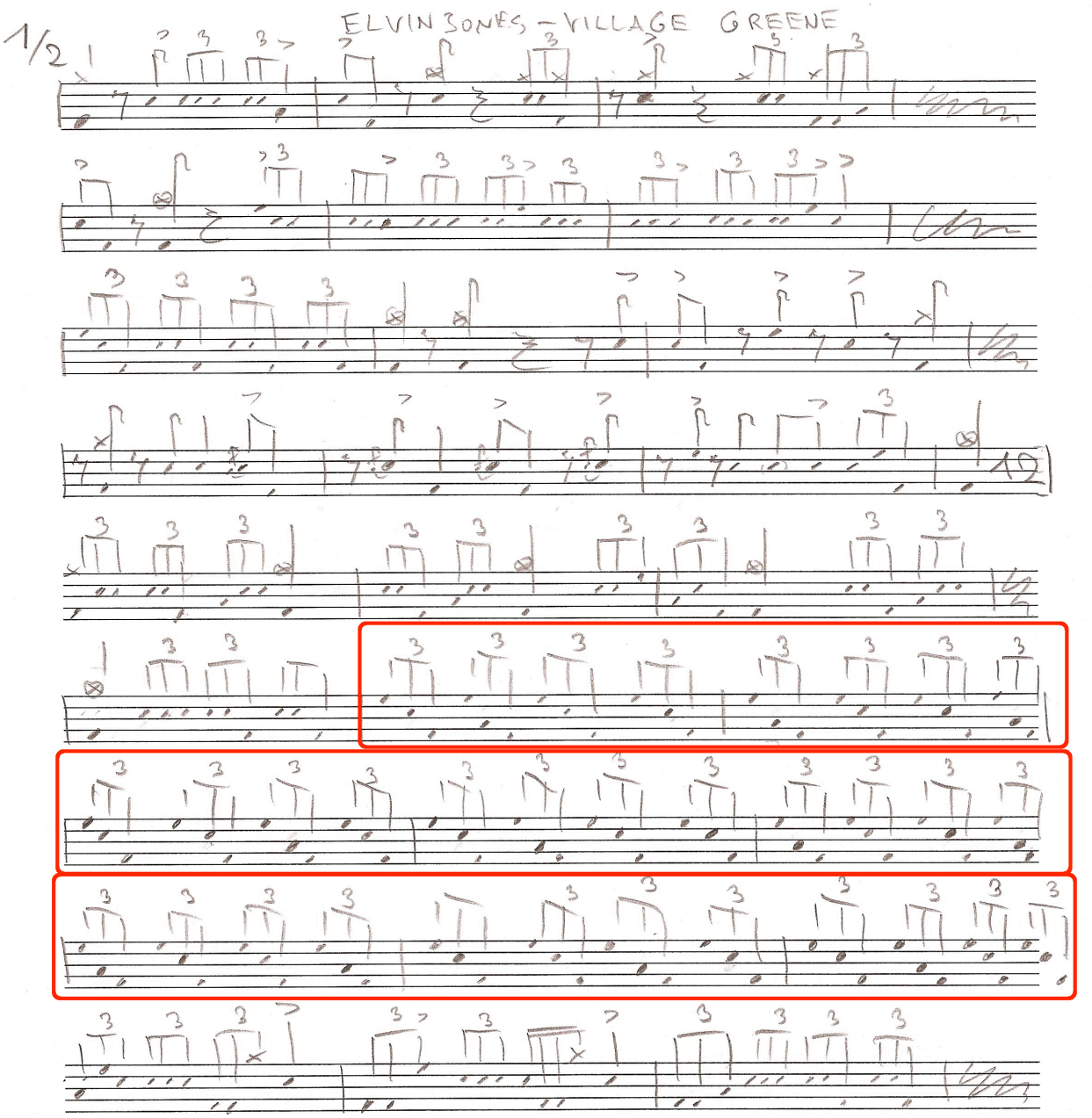
1.1.2.b) Playing the drum set as one instrument

There is a difference in applying this concept to accompaniment and to playing a drum solo. In his solos, Elvin is literally creating a sound which is non-transparent and makes it almost impossible to identify the single notes played by the individual parts of the instrument.

In the following transcription of 'Village Greene' from Elvin Jones' recording 'Puttin' it together', released by Blue Note in 1968, I have marked phrases which are

basically a combination of two alternating hits with the sticks followed by a bass drum hit. I have tried to identify the exact hand setting he used because sometimes it sounds as if he was even playing a 3/4 phrase within this idea, but I cannot be sure that it is absolutely correct.
As you might notice, he plays a polyrhythmic 3/4 idea before that phrase.

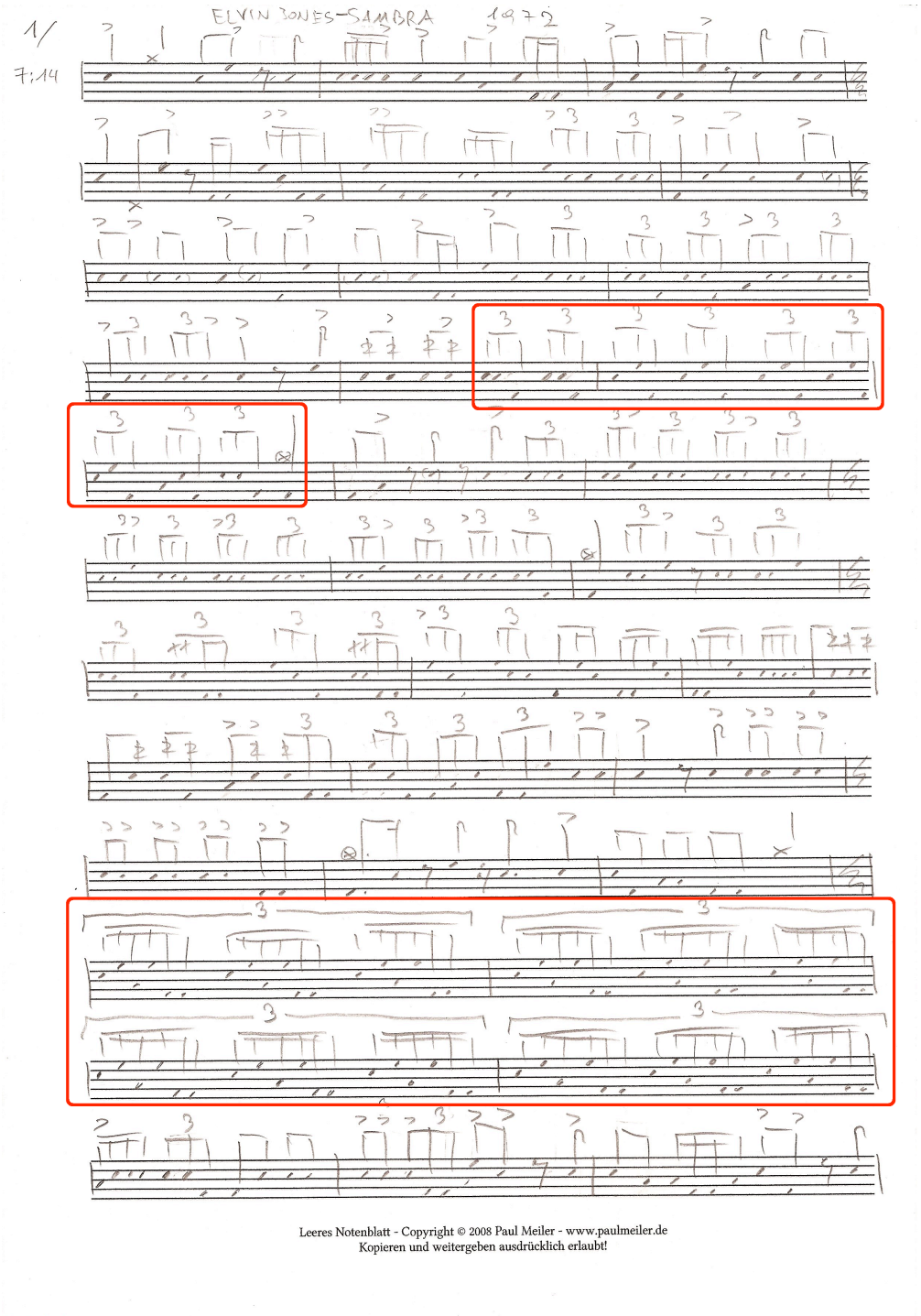
Transcription 11



Another example of this method can be found in this transcription of 'Sambra' from

Elvin Jones' recording 'Live at the Lighthouse', released by Blue Note in 1973.[24]

Transcription 12



24 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Live_at_the_Lighthouse_%28Elvin_Jones_album%29, 13.12.2015, 12:25

1.1.2.c) Use of a vast dynamic range

As I have already mentioned, Elvin Jones made use of a lot of dynamics in his phrases during accompaniment. He applied this concept to his drum solos as well. The accents or so-called landing points of his ideas are the loudest notes of all.
The following transcription is of 'Speak low' from Grant Green's recording 'I want to hold your hand', released by Blue Note records in 1965.[25]
The areas circled in red are, in terms of dynamics, the loudest of the solo. In order to emphasise them even more he plays a crescendo which is indicated by the blue marks, as well as soft taps, indicated by the orange circles.
If you take a closer look at the first phrase marked blue you might recognise it as the concept of playing the drum set as one instrument. It is interesting to note that within the phrase itself he also employs several levels of dynamics. The hits on the tom tom marked green are at a constant volume, whereas the others vary. Through this sequence of rapid changes in dynamics he is able to create immense tension. Another observation is that the crossed peak notes marked red are usually a follow-up of a phrase with a high density of notes. This contrast functions as a release of tension.

Transcription 13

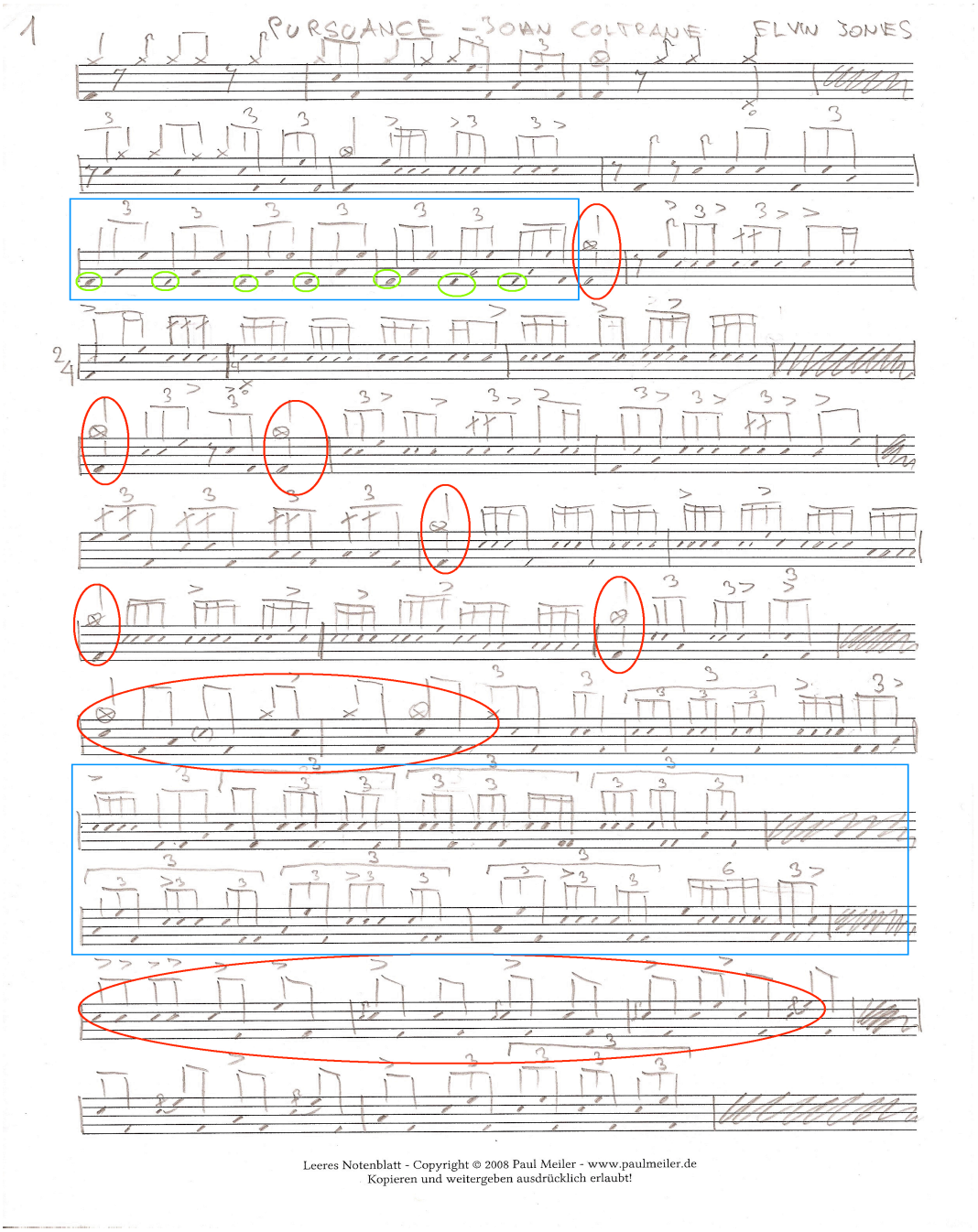


25 Comp. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Want_to_Hold_Your_Hand_(album), 13.12.2015, 12:54

This transcription of the drum intro to 'Pursuance' from John Coltrane's 'A love supreme' shows some more examples.

The colour system is basically the same as before. In the first phrase marked blue you can see that compared to the example above, the bass drum hit marked green is now the constant of the idea.

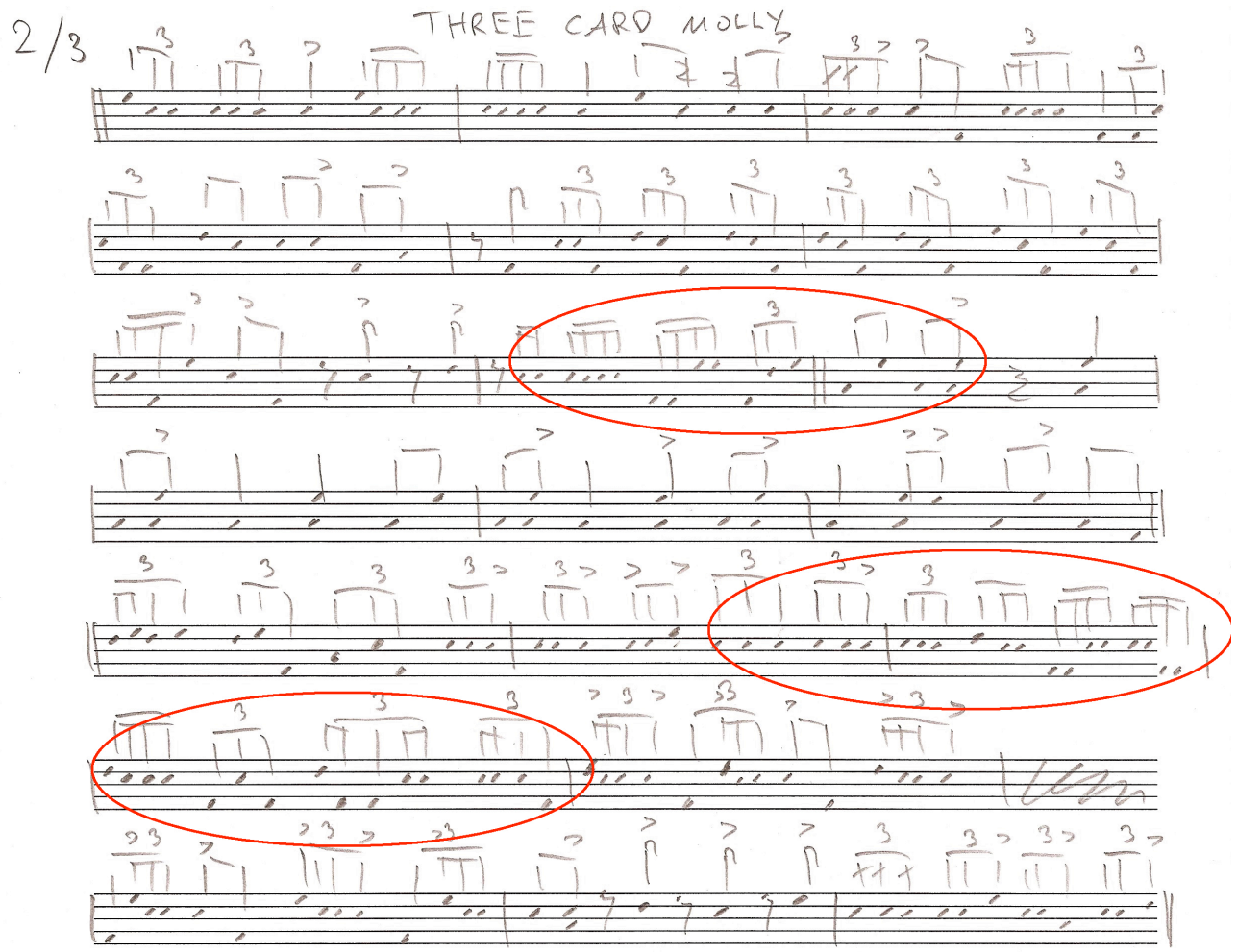
Transcription 14



1.1.2.d) Quick changes of note values within a phrase

With this concept, Elvin discovered another way of creating tension within his drum solos. By playing triplets after 16th notes or the other way round he gives the listener the illusion of speeding up or slowing down.
In the following transcription of 'Three card Molly' from the documentary 'Elvin Jones – different drummer', he uses that method extensively.

Transcription 15



This concept can even be found in solos from 1957 as the following transcription of 'Beauteous' from Paul Chamber's recording 'Paul Chamber's Quintet', released by Blue Note Records, shows.[26]

Transcription 16



1.2) Predecessors

As history shows, there have always been people who were the first to do certain things, but in the end were overlooked or someone else got the credit for their accomplishments. Therefore I would like to mention two drummers who were pioneers in the field of jazz.

1.2.1) Tiny Kahn

Tiny Kahn was probably the first drummer ever to loosen up the stiff structure of the standard cymbal beat. One could argue that he is a predecessor of Elvin's approach of playing the drum set as one instrument and applying polyrhythmics to the accompaniment. Elvin himself never stated in any interview that he was directly influenced by him.

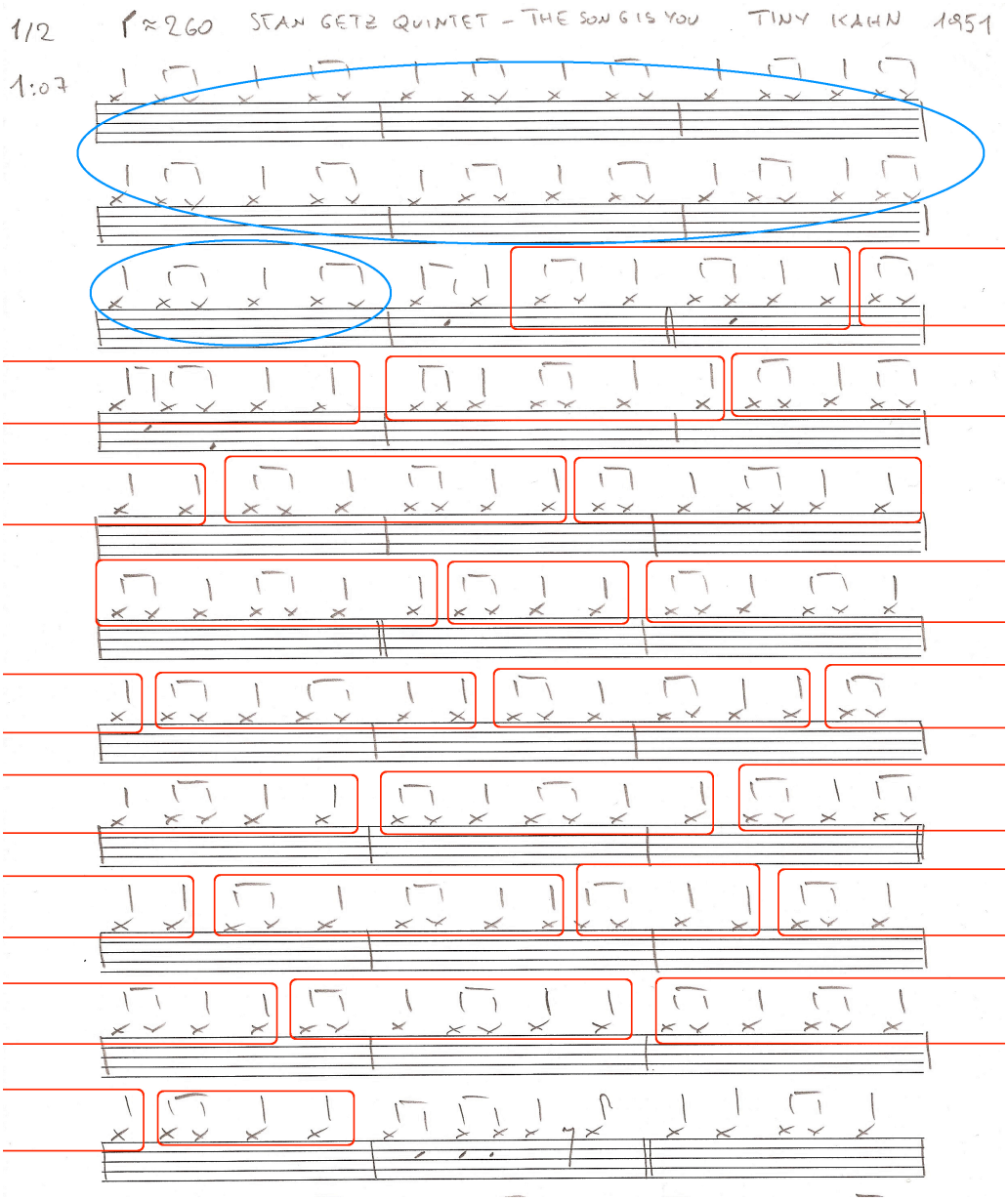
26 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Chambers_Quintet, 13.12.2015, 14:50

Because of Tiny Kahn's early death at age 30 in 1953 he never got the recognition he deserved. [27]

The following transcription is of 'The song is you' from Stan Getz' recording 'Live at Storyville', recorded in 1951.[28]

The notes marked blue are still part of the standard swing pattern whereas the phrases circled in red are actually 5/4 figures over the 4/4 meter.

Transcription 17

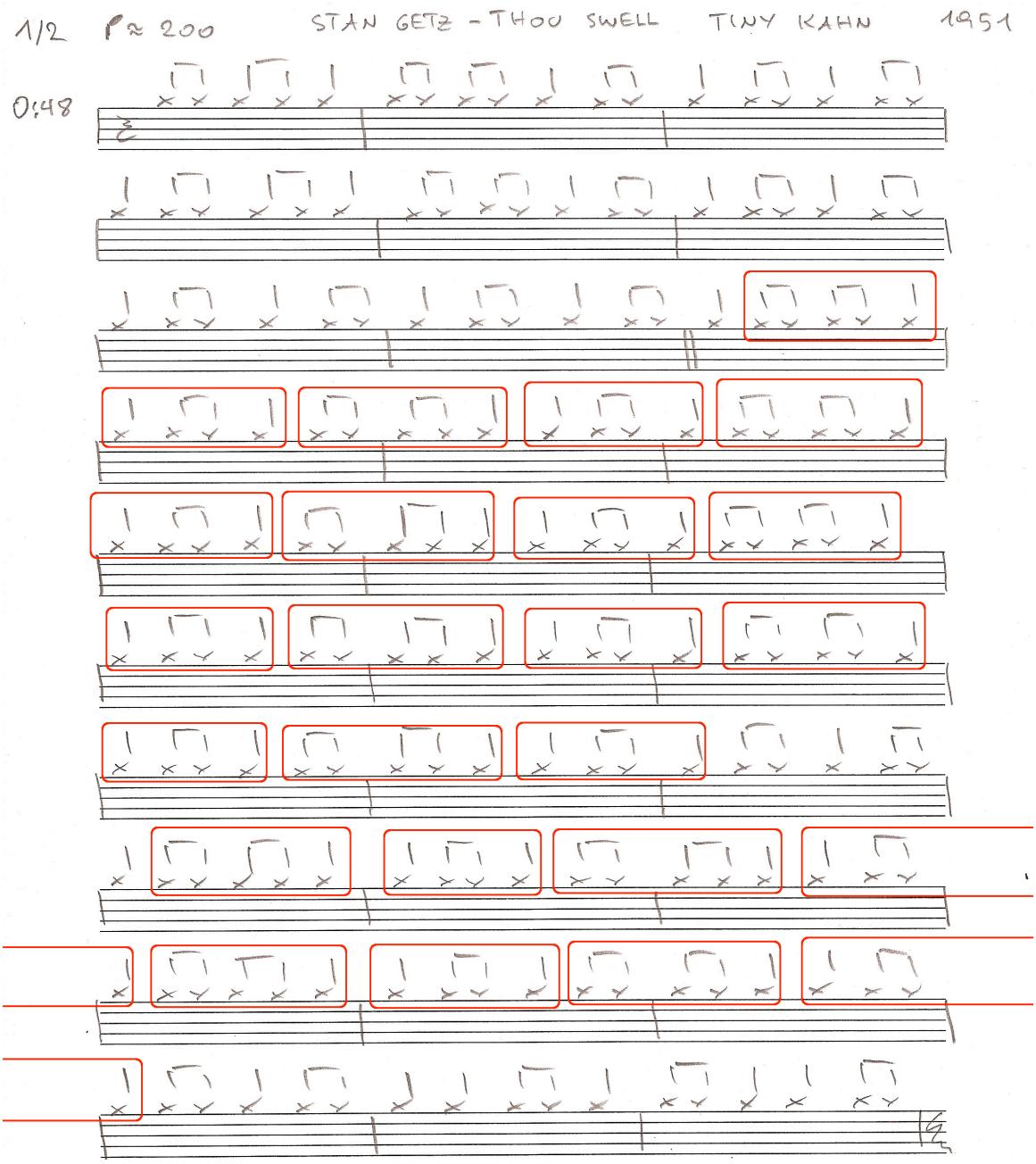


27 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiny_Kahn, 13.12.2015, 15:15

28 Comp. http://www.allmusic.com/album/stan-getz-at-storyville-vols-1-2-mw0000311051, 13.12.2015, 15:19

In the next transcription of 'Thou swell', also taken from Stan Getz' recording 'Live at Storyville', he plays a 3/4 phrase with his ride cymbal over the 4/4 meter.
As you can see, Tiny Kahn does not vary his phrases at all. Although he loosens up the stiff structure of the ride cymbal beat by playing those polyrhythmic phrases over the bars, he lacks Elvin's variations and creativity.

Transcription 18



1.2.2) Roy Haynes

Roy Haynes is one of the most famous drummers in the history of jazz and one of the last living legends who had the opportunity to play with the alto player Charlie Parker, one of the inventors of bebop.[29]
Like Tiny Kahn, he was one of the first drummers who loosened up the stiff swing pattern of the ride cymbal and later on became the pioneer of the concept of linear playing I have already explained earlier.
In the following transcription of 'In walked Bud' from Thelonious Monk's 'Thelonious in Action: Live at the Five Spot Cafe', recorded and released in 1958, the examples of the variations of the ride cymbal pattern are obvious as he shifts and varies it all the time.[30]The areas marked red are particularly good examples of linear playing where the leading voice changes from one part of the instrument to the next.

Transcription 19



29 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy_Haynes, 13.12.2015, 15:41
30 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thelonious_in_Action, 13.12.2015, 15:57

2.) Elvin Jones' legacy

"*The only way, I guess, to illustrate or adequately define Elvin's contribution to the drums would be to play a record of a pre Elvin Jones drummer, play a record of Elvin Jones and play a record of a post Elvin Jones drummer. I think these three examples would best illustrate Elvin's contribution to the drums better than words could say.*"[31]

This chapter deals with the way drummers approached the heritage of Elvin Jones. I will identify the specified characteristics of his style in transcriptions of pieces the following three drummers:

1.1.) Jack Dejohnette
1.2.) Jeff 'Tain' Watts
1.3.) Brian Blade

2.1) Jack Dejohnette

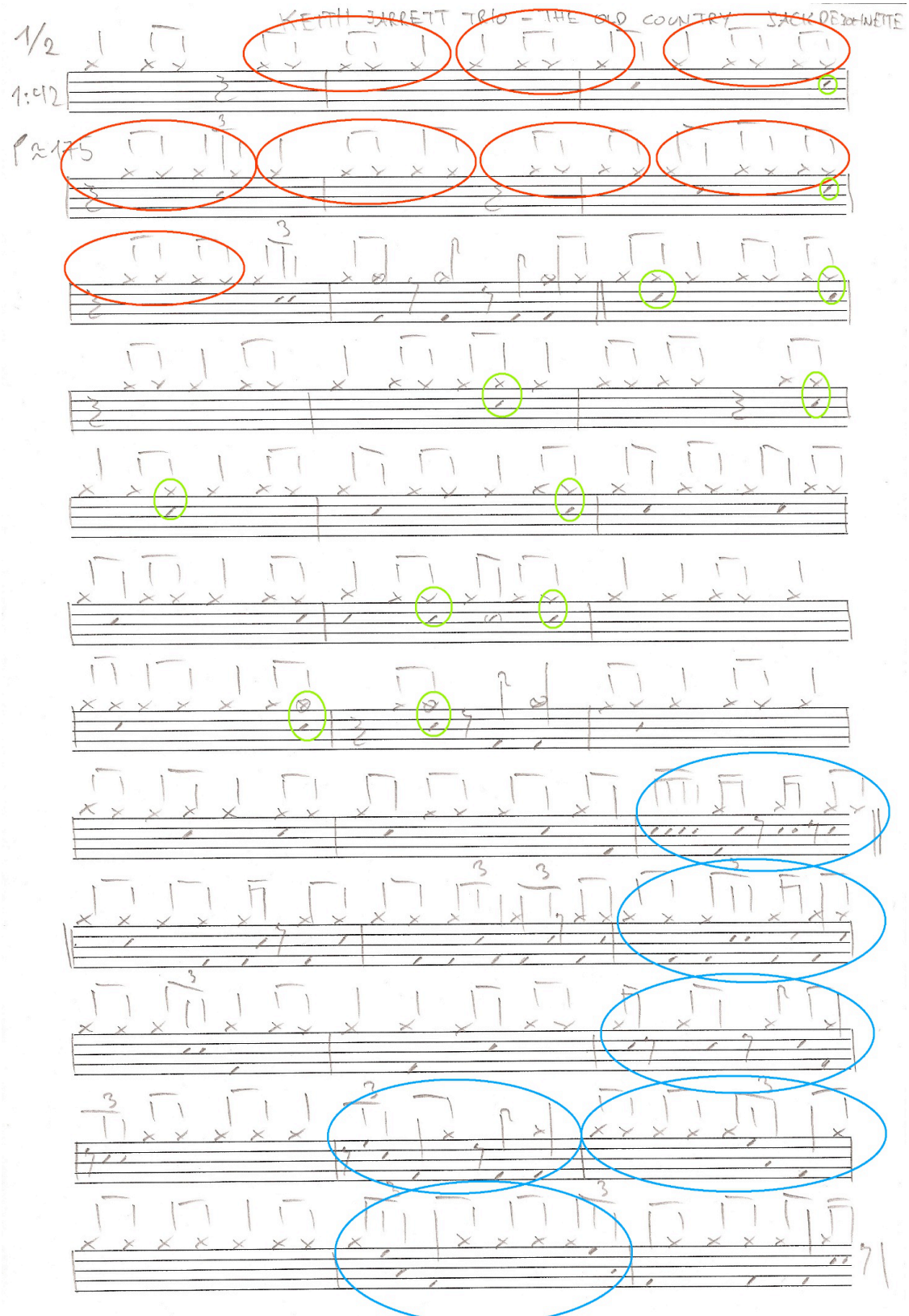
Jack Dejohnette represents the first generation of post-Elvin Jones drummers. Born in 1942, he started his musical carreer in the early 1960s. At that time, Elvin had already developed his style and was the drummer in the John Coltrane Quartet.[32]
I would like to take at look at his accompaniment and his drum solos separately.

2.1.1) Accompaniment

The following transcription is of 'The old country' from the Keith Jarrett Trio recording 'Standards live' at the Palais des Congrès, Paris,released in 1985.[33]

31 Carter, Ron, documentary 'Elvin Jones – different drummer', 18:27 min
32 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_DeJohnette, 15.12.2015, 18:19
33 Comp. http://www.jazzdisco.org/standards/discography/, 15.12.2015, 18:23

Transcription 20



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In the beginning he plays a polyrhythmic three beat phrase over the 4/4 meter, highlighted here by the red circles. The accents marked green are assisted by additional hits on the snare drum. In the first part, up to the sections circled in blue, he uses polyrhythmic phrases and accents the skip note. The main ideas are played on the ride cymbal. Therefore you could argue that he is using the concept of playing the drum set as one instrument.
However, on examining the phrases circled blue it becomes evident that he is using the concept of linear playing. Take a look at the following transcription of Roy Haynes' 'In walked Bud'. As I have already mentioned, he was one of the first drummers who played linear ideas in his accompaniment. The phrases marked red are examples of this method and are similar to the ones marked blue from the transcription above.

Transcription 21



In the following transcription of 'All the things you are' from Keith Jarrett's 'Standards' released in 1983 by ECM I would like to examine the dynamics in Jack Dejohnette's cymbal beat.[34]

The notes marked red are the accents. When you compare his playing style to Elvin's, Jack Dejohnette tends to play these accented notes by crashing the cymbal. Because he uses cymbals with a very short sustain he gets a short staccato accent as a result.

The notes highlighted in green are played in mf range whereas the ones highlighted in orange are very soft taps.

Transcription 22



2.1.2) Drum solos

In order to find similarities between both drummers, I have transcribed and analysed 'Josie & Rosie' from Joe Lovano's recording 'Universal language', released by Blue Note in 1992.[35]

The method of 'playing the drum set as one instrument' is evidenced by the phrases circled in red. Jack makes use of that idea extensively.

These phrases contain a high density of notes which makes it almost impossible to identify which part of the drum set is actually being played.

They are followed by transparent ideas, marked here with blue circles. This

34 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standards_%28Jarrett_album%29, 15.12.2015, 19:28
35 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Language_(Joe_Lovano_album), 15.12.2015, 19:37

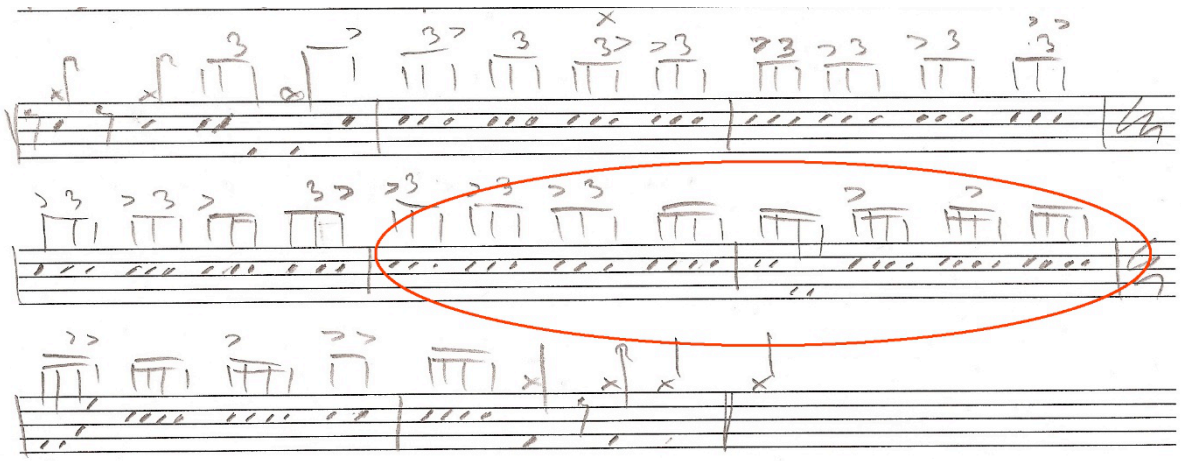
method of creating tension and release can also be found in Elvin Jones' drum solo on 'Speak low', as I have already pointed out.

Transcription 23



Although in one of his tradings[36] of 'Falling in Love with Love' from the Keith Jarrett Trio's recording 'Standards live' at the Palais des Congrès, Paris, released in 1985 he uses the method of changing the note value within a phrase, I would not consider it an essential part of his drum solo approach.[37]

Transcription 24



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2.2) Jeff 'Tain' Watts

2.2.1) Accompaniment

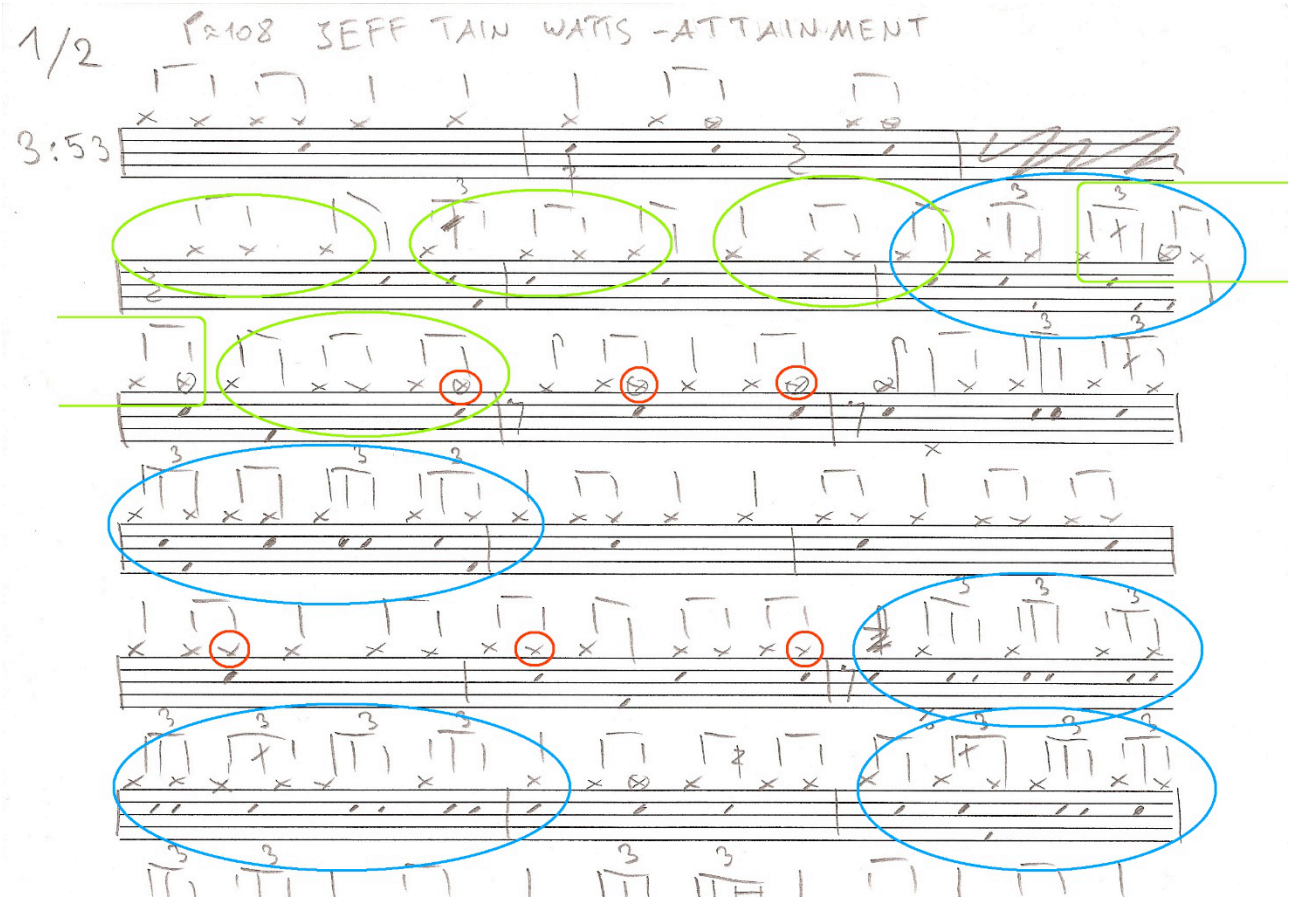
The following transcription is of 'Attainment' from Jeff 'Tain' Watts' recording 'Citizen Tain', released by Columbia Records in 1999.[38]
The tempo of the song is approximately 108 bpm. The phrases highlighted green show the use of polyrhythmic three beat phrases within the 4/4 meter. The ones marked blue show the implementation of triplets in order to colour the main idea played on the ride cymbal. He accents the skip note too, as evidenced by the notes circled in red.

36 Tradings are a form of discontinuous drum solo in which a specific amount od measure sections are alternately played solo by the drummer, and by the band with another soloist.
37 Comp. http://www.jazzdisco.org/standards/discography/, 15.12.2015, 20:27

38 Comp. http://www.allaboutjazz.com/citizen-tain-jeff-tain-watts-columbia-records-review-by-david-adler.php, 16.12.2015, 16:23

In such a slow tempo you can find many similarities between Jeff 'Tain' Watts and Elvin Jones.

Transcription 25

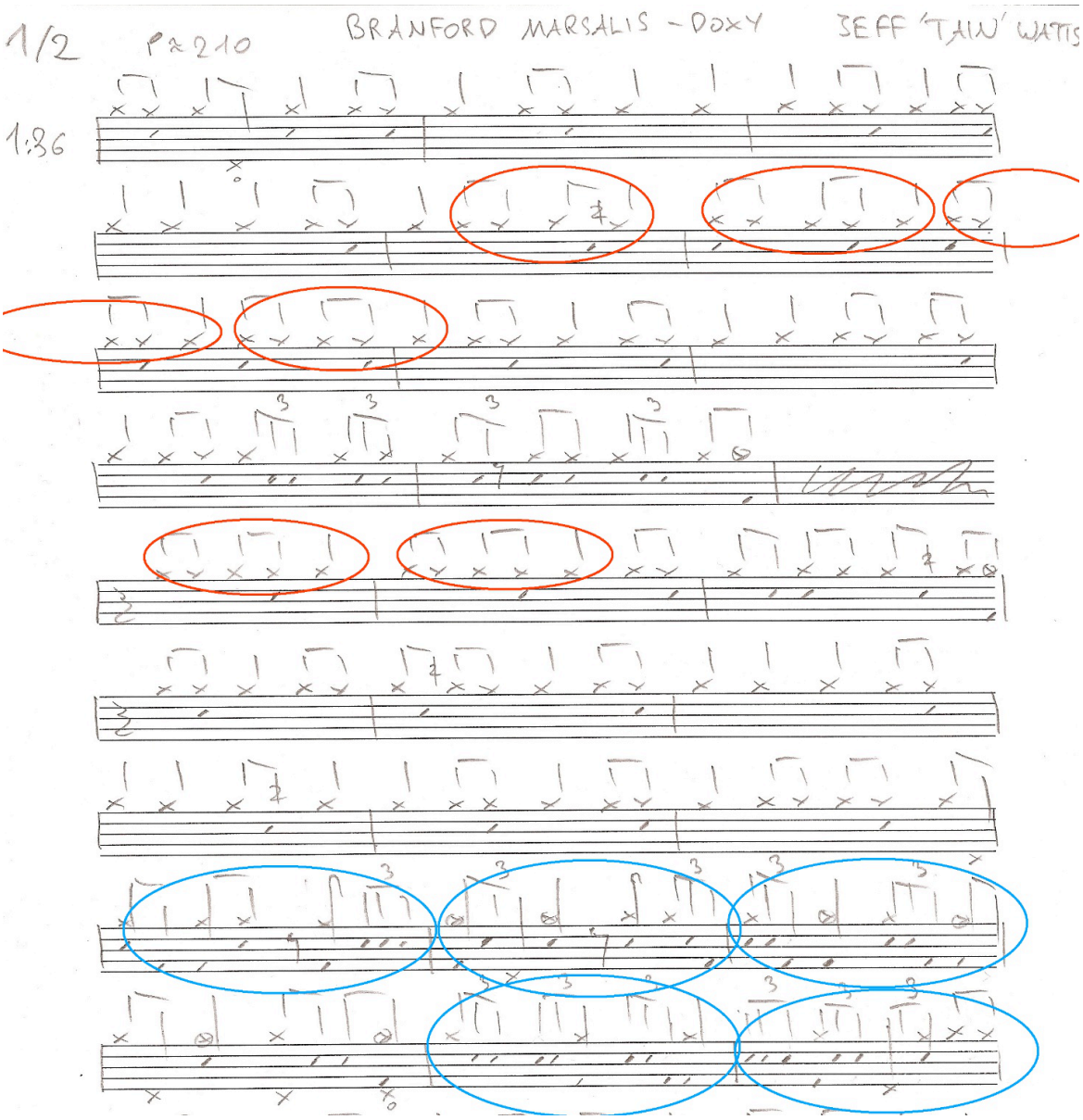


The next transcription is of 'Doxy' from Branford Marsalis' recording 'Tio Jeepy', released by Sony Music in 1989.[39]

This time the tempo is almost twice as fast as in the example above. It is still possble to find some of Elvin's characteristics in his playing, such as the polyrhythmic three beat phrases, marked red or the triplet patterns, circled blue. However, the most striking difference lies in the articulation of the cymbal beat. Elvin constantly shifts the accents within the 4/4 meter. In this example, Jeff 'Tain' Watts accents each quarter note, unlike in the transcription above where he also accented skip notes.By keeping that steady quarter note pulse, his cymbal beat turns out to be more constant.

39 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trio_Jeepy, 16.12.2015, 16:40

Transcription 26



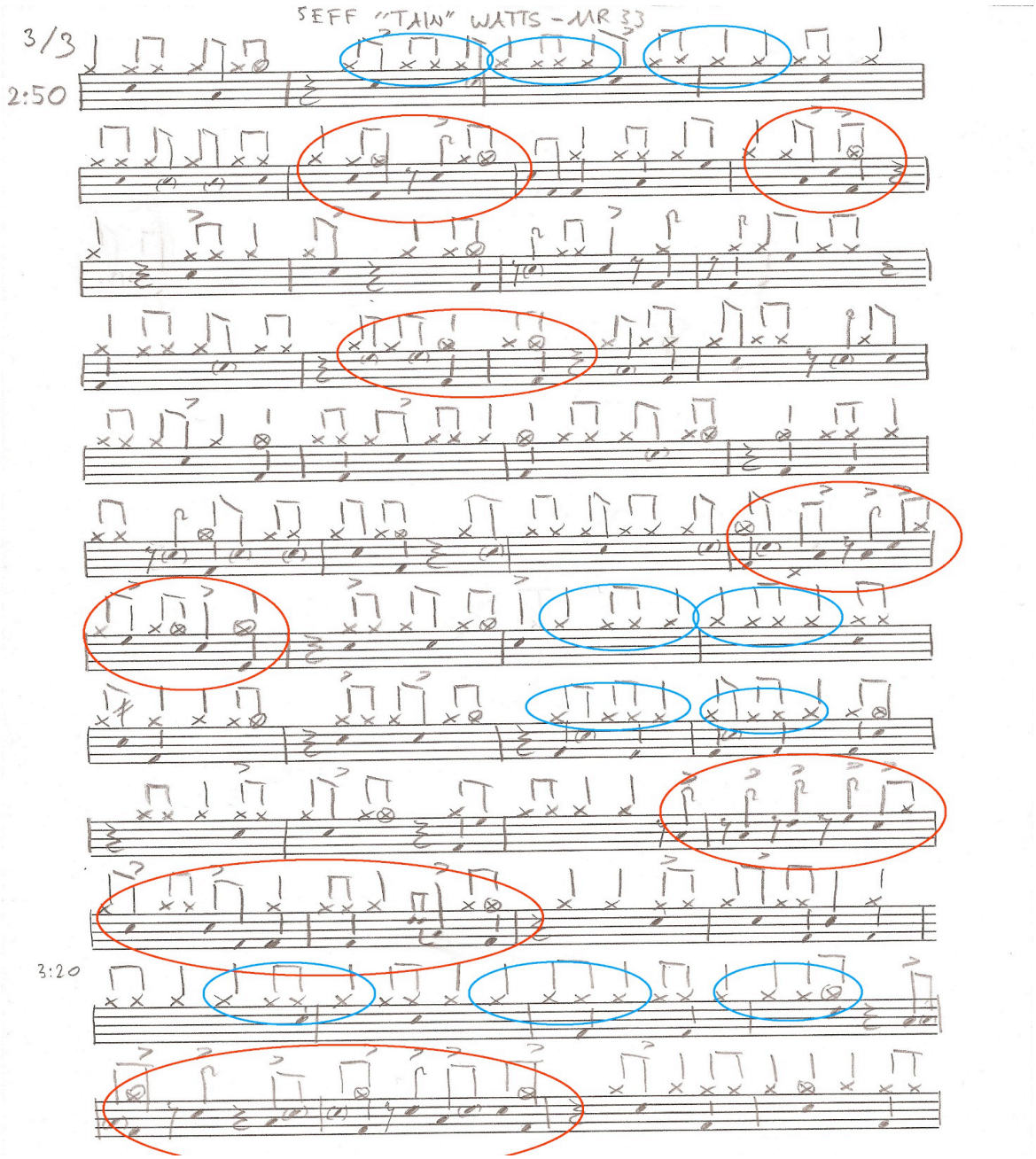
To conclude my analysis of Jeff 'Tain' Watts' accompaniment approach, I would like you to take a look at the transciption of 'Mr JJ' from his recording 'Bar talk', released by Columbia Records in 2002.[40]

The tempo of this recording is 300 bpm. One could argue that this style is clearly inspired by Elvin Jones when you take average dynamics and density of notes into consideration. In my opinion, he uses a linear approach heavily influenced by Tony Williams.

40 Comp. http://www.allaboutjazz.com/bar-talk-jeff-tain-watts-columbia-records-review-by-jim-santella.php, 16.12.2015, 17:04

The ride cymbal is not the main focal point of the ideas he is playing. That does not mean that its importance to the continuity of the groove is diminished. On top of the ride cymbal he plays a lot of phrases with strong accents around the drum set. Sometimes his cymbal gets overshadowed by his expressive drumming. The sections marked red are examples of those bursting ideas, the notes circled blue are some more polyrhythmic three beat phrases.

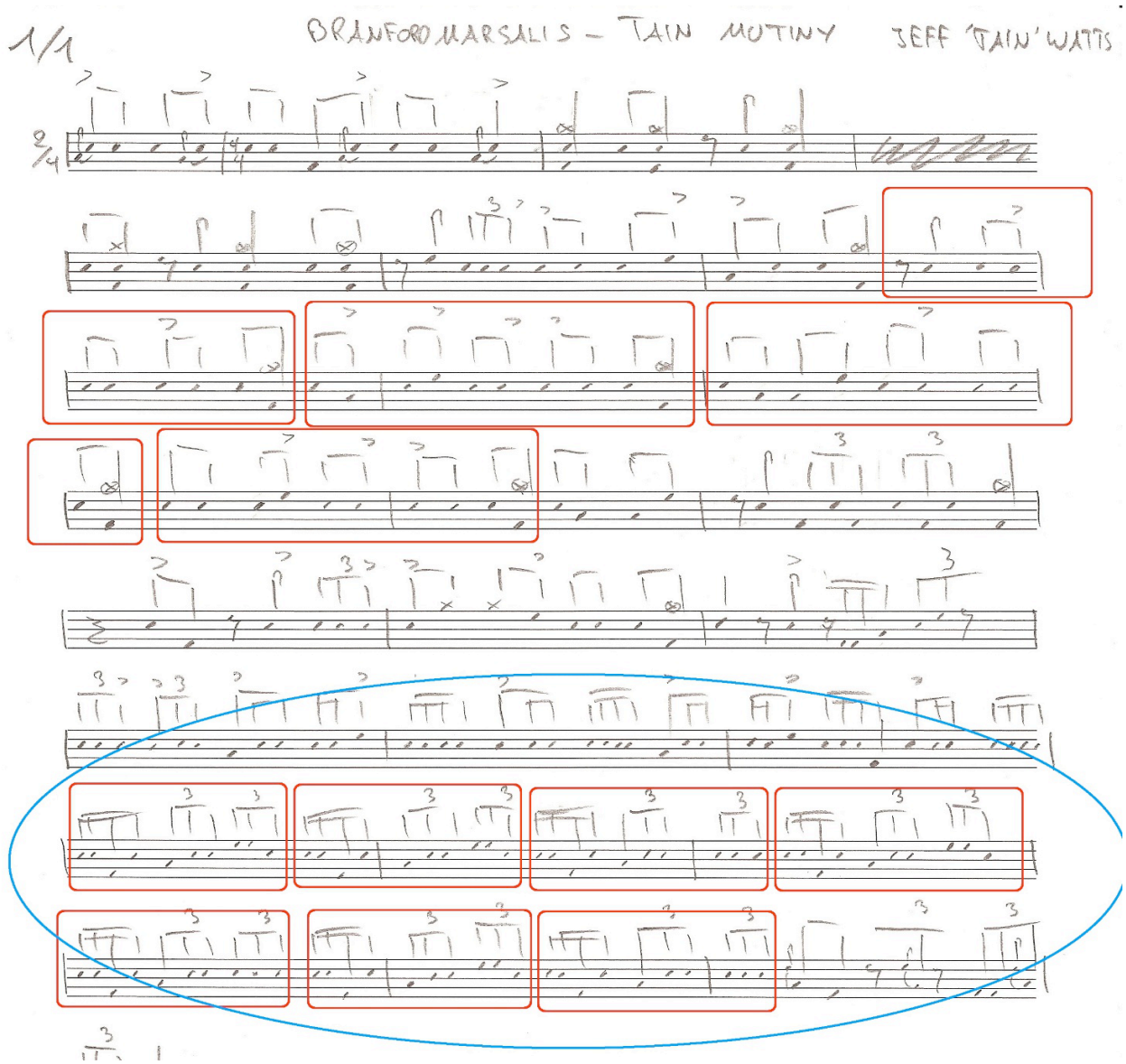
Transcription 27



1.4.) Drum solos

The following transcription is of 'Tain Mutiny' from Branford Marsalis' 'Contemporary Jazz', released by Sony Music in 2000.[41] The notes highlighted red in the beginning are polyrhythmic five beat phrases over the 4/4 meter, whereas the others are three beat figures. In the area marked blue, Jeff 'Tain' is using Elvin's approach of playing the drum set as one instrument, evidenced by the high density of notes.

Transcription 28



41 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contemporary_Jazz_(Branford_Marsalis_album, 16.12.2015, 17:58

2.3) Brian Blade

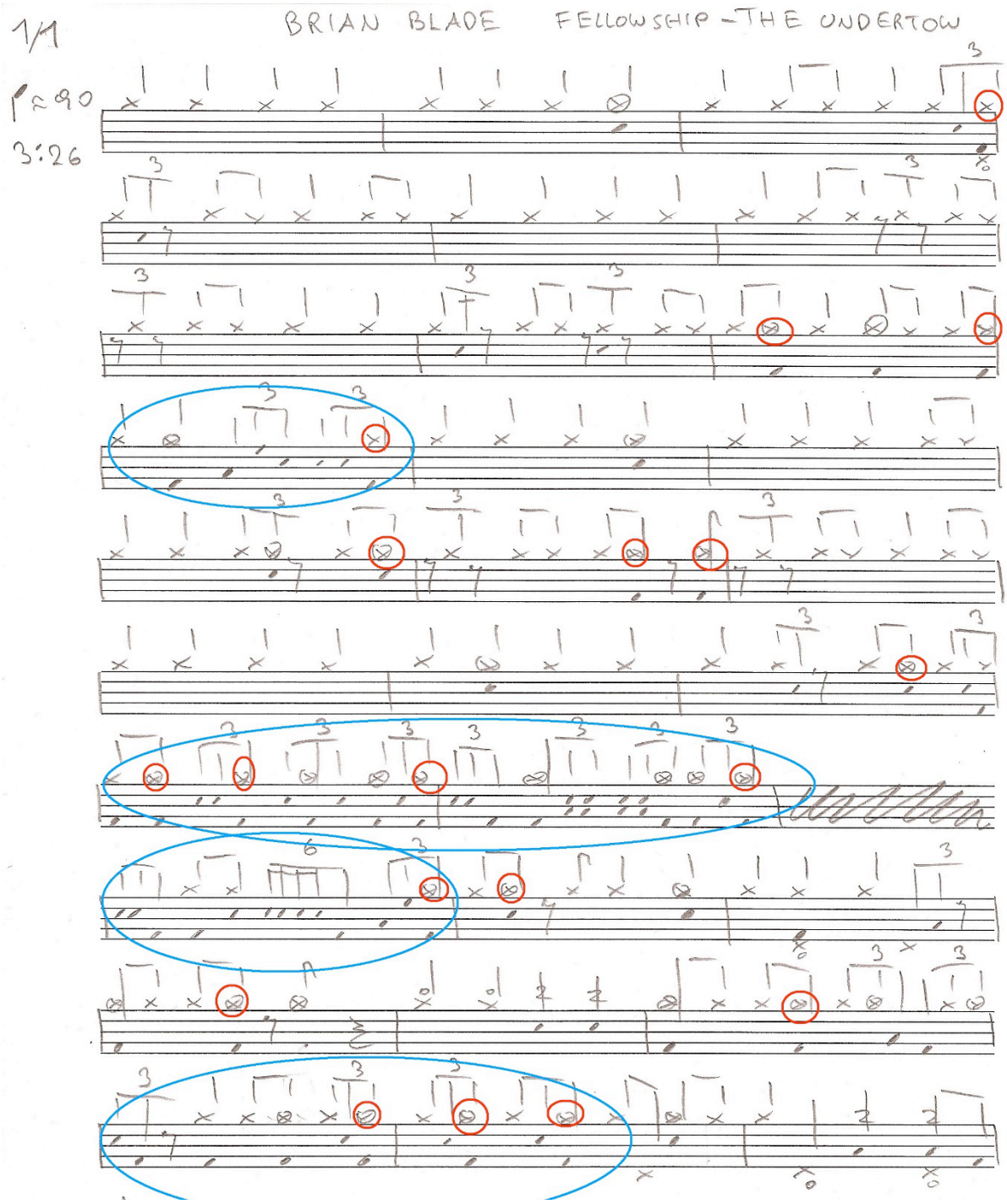
"Fortunately, I've been able to see Elvin several times over the last ten years actually, and God, it gets better and better every time. A Love Supreme was one of the first records that sticks in my consciousness. It's an ideal that you aspire to."[42]

2.3.1) Accompaniment

The following trancription is of 'Undertow' from Brian Blade's 'Brian Blade fellowship', released by Blue Note in 1998.[43] The tempo of this tune is 90 bpm.
As in Jeff 'Tain' Watts' transcription of 'Attainment', Brian uses similar concepts. For instance, the phrases highlighted blue are examples of Elvin's triplet grid. In order to broaden the beat he accents the skip note, as evidenced by the notes circled in red. However, he does not play any kinds of polyrhythmic structures in this particular piece.

42 Comp. https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/07/28/two-interviews-with-drummer-brian-blade/, 16.12.2015, 18:10
43 Comp. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Blade_Fellowship_(album), 16.12.2015, 18:23

Transcription 29

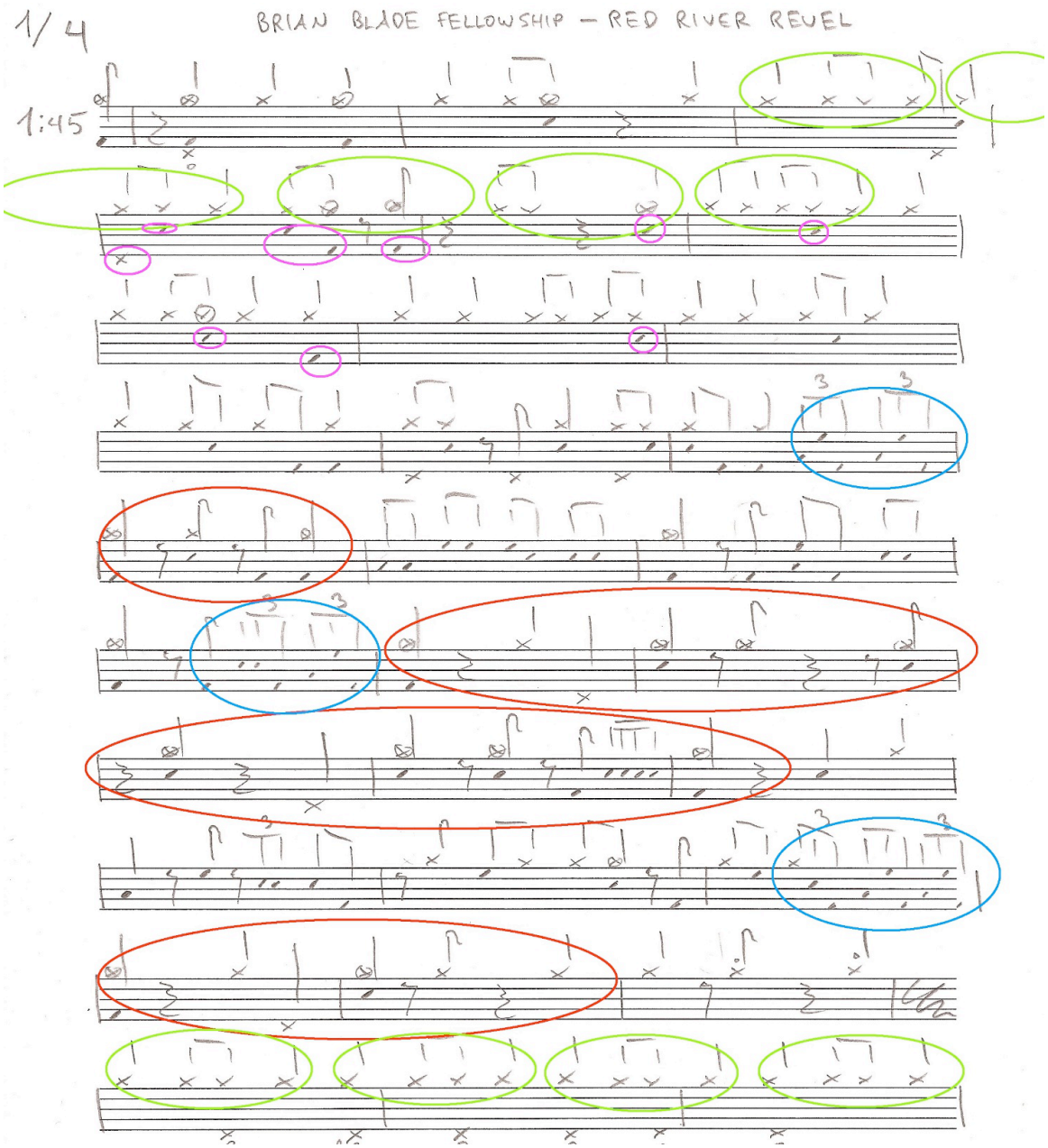


The next transcription is of 'Red river revel' from Brian Blade's 'Brian Blade fellowship' and is a prime example of the unique way he uses dynamics in his accompaniment. In contrast to Elvin Jones, his average volume is lower. Nevertheless, his accented notes are very strong. The phrases marked red are very

loud. As you can see, like Elvin, Brian Blade tends to play a theme that makes use of solo concept of 'playing the drum set as one instrument', right before his accents.

Unlike in the transcribed section of 'The undertow', Brian Blade now plays polyrhythmic three beat phrases over the 4/4 meter. In his accompaniment of this tune, Elvin's approach of building the phrase around the main idea of his ride cymbal is evident. The notes marked pink function as a support to the ride cymbal.

Transcription 30



2.3.2) Drum solos

As in Elvin's drum solos Brian Blade makes extensive use of dynamics in order to create tension. I transcribed the following drum solo from a youtube video of 'Billy Child's Quartet – Live at The Bistro in St Louis'.
The areas circled blue highlight a repeating phrase. He uses the 'playing the drum set as one instrument' method here, as evidenced by the high density of notes. Both phrases resolve in strong accents which are marked red. Before the resolution of the second phrase he plays a crescendo which is highlighted in orange.The section marked green is played piano. It consists of a polyrhythmic five eighth note phrase against the 4/4 meter.

Transcription 31



3.)Conclusion

Elvin Jones is rightly considered a genius of his genre. Like Max Roach in the 1940s, he managed to change the approach to jazz and created a new way of playing the drums.[44]

His departure from the unwritten law that communication between soloist and drummer must come exclusively from the bass drum and snare drum, to 'playing the drum set as one instrument' was revolutionary in the music of the 1960s and it fundamentally changed the role of the drummer in the structure of a band.

"*Know the rules well, so you can break them effectively.*"
— His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama

In my opinion, it is not only essential that you know the rules before breaking them, but the stage at which you do so is also of crucial importance. In Elvin Jones' case, this took place in the first half of the 1960s.
An important catalyst for his work was without doubt the influence and the association with his fellow musicians in the John Coltrane Quartet. Each one of them was a virtuoso in his own right and an innovator in his field. This coming together of creative minds allowed Elvin to fully develop his personal style.
The John Coltrane Quartet was the voice and the leading force of this era and significantly influenced future generations of musicians, such as the drummer Jack DeJohnette. He came onto the New York jazz scene in the mid-1960s and went on to become one of the most important musicians of his time. I would consider his style a fusion of those of Elvin Jones and Tony Williams.
You can clearly see from the transcription of "The old country", which I have analysed in the previous chapter, that he was able to combine the linear playing method with 'playing the drums as one instrument'. Like Elvin, he accentuated the skip note and created a broader phrasing both in slow and fast tempos.
When it came to selecting other drummers who had been influenced by Elvin Jones, I could clearly see the importance of his work. You can find characteristics of his style in the playing of the majority of contemporary drummers. His methods

44 Max Roach's major innovation in the 1940's was to play the beat-by-beat pulse of standard 4/4 time on the "ride" cymbal instead of on the thudding bass drum.

are especially evident in slower swing tempos, whereas drummers nowadays tend to more often apply the style of linear playing, influenced by Roy Haynes and Tony Williams, to medium and up tempos.
I finally chose Brian Blade and Jeff 'Tain' Watts. As I have already explained, they, together with Jack DeJohnette, each represent a different generation of drummers. This illustrates Elvin Jones' ubiquitous influence on jazz musicians over the years.
Each of the three has adopted specific Elvin Jones styles and interpreted these in his own way. An example of this would be Brian Blade's unique use of dynamics. He manages to use this concept like nobody else. In contrast to Elvin, his basic volume is much lower, therefore giving him even more room for dynamics.
Jeff 'Tain' Watts uses polyrhythmic phrases as part of his accompaniment and the concept of 'playing the drum set as one instrument' in his solos. There was also another reason why I decided to analyse his style. I see strong similarities between his sound on the instrument and the intensity of his playing with those of Elvin's. On closer analysis, I eventually noticed that, in contrast to the other two, he uses fewer of Elvin's musical concepts. Nevertheless, the sound of the instrument is also of vital importance in making music and the parallels should not be overlooked.

In conclusion, I would like to touch on my own artistic development in the course of this research and say where I expect to go from here.
As I have already mentioned in my introduction, I had not specifically dealt with the heritage of Elvin Jones before, but I had analysed several other jazz drummers, Tony Williams and Roy Haynes in particular. On reflection, I came to the conclusion that Elvin's concept of 'playing the drum set as one instrument' can be seen in contrast to the linear methods of those two. Interestingly, because of this relationship the study of his concepts helped me gain a better understanding of Tony Williams and Roy Haynes as well.
I am now also able to identify these methods in the playing of contemporary drummers, which makes stylistic analysis a lot easier, as I have already experienced in the process of working on my second chapter.
One of my teachers once told me that listening to recordings is the most important part of learning to play jazz. In the course of transcribing the material which was

an essential part of this research, I had to listen very closely to the music. This has helped me to increase my awareness of various styles of modern jazz drumming and, at the same time, I have learned how to apply those methods to my own playing.

Finally, my next goal is to develop a pedagogical concept based on the findings of this research, as teaching has also been an important part of my artistic development in the past.

4.) Appendix

4.1.) Elvin Jones

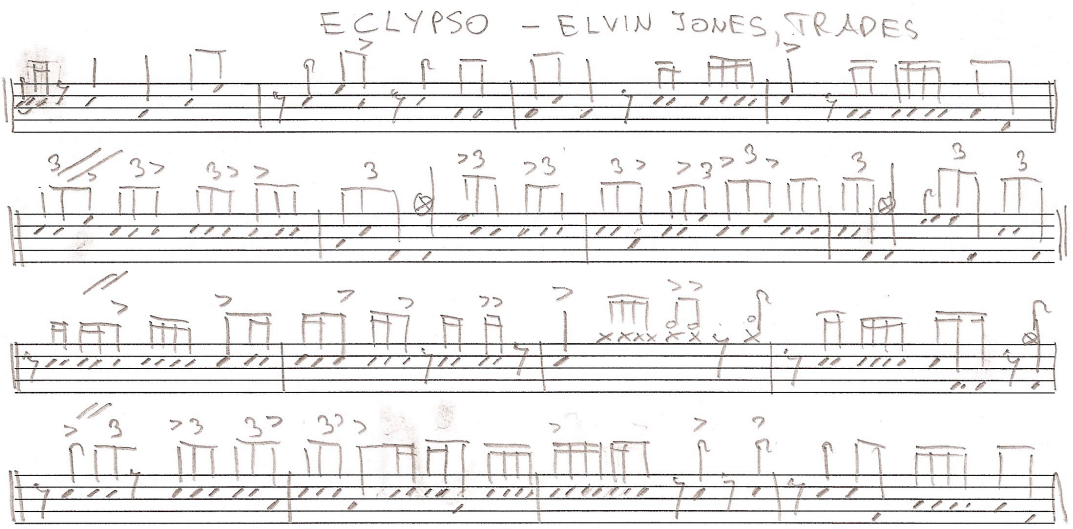
4.1.1.) Drum Solos



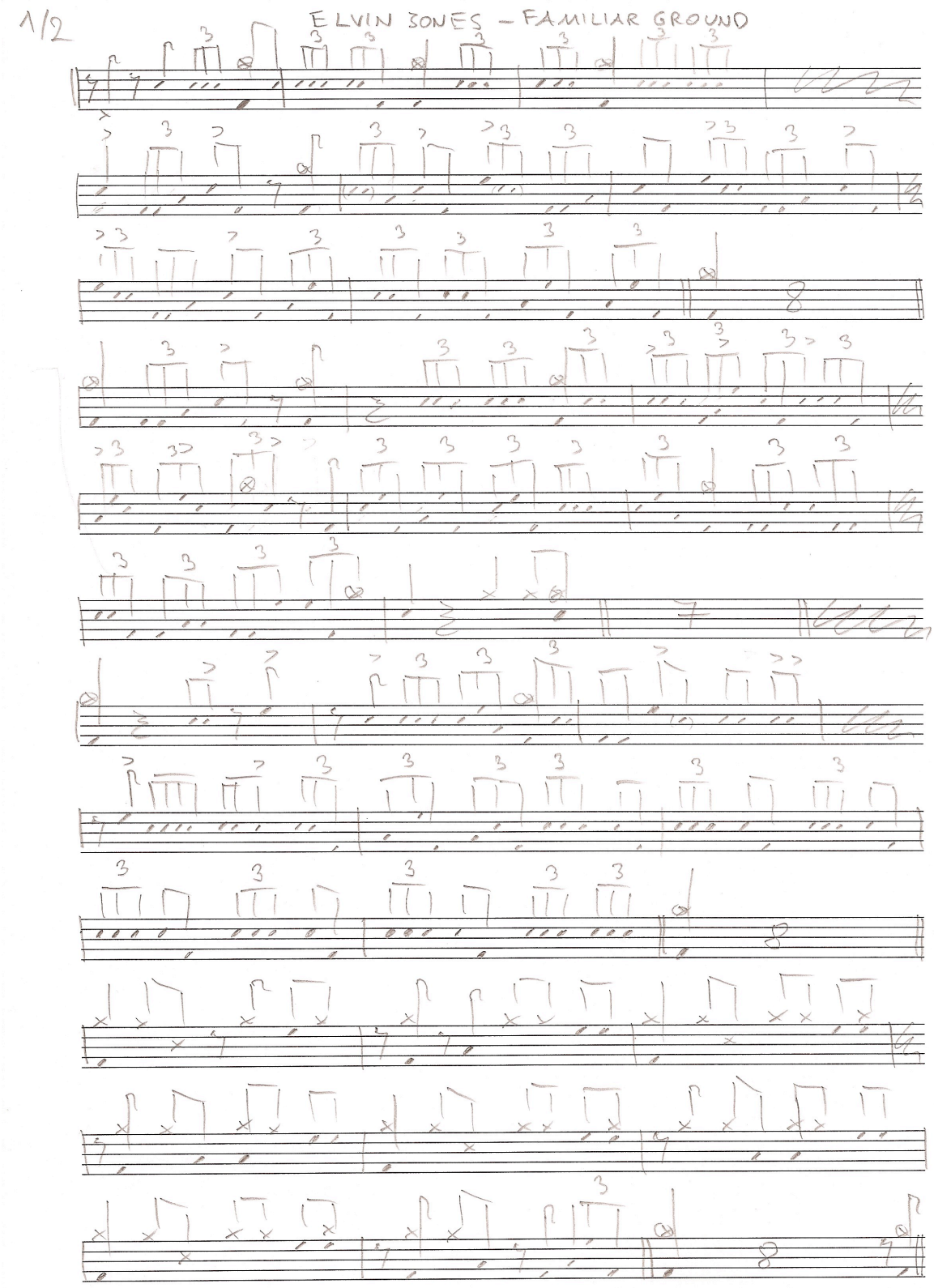
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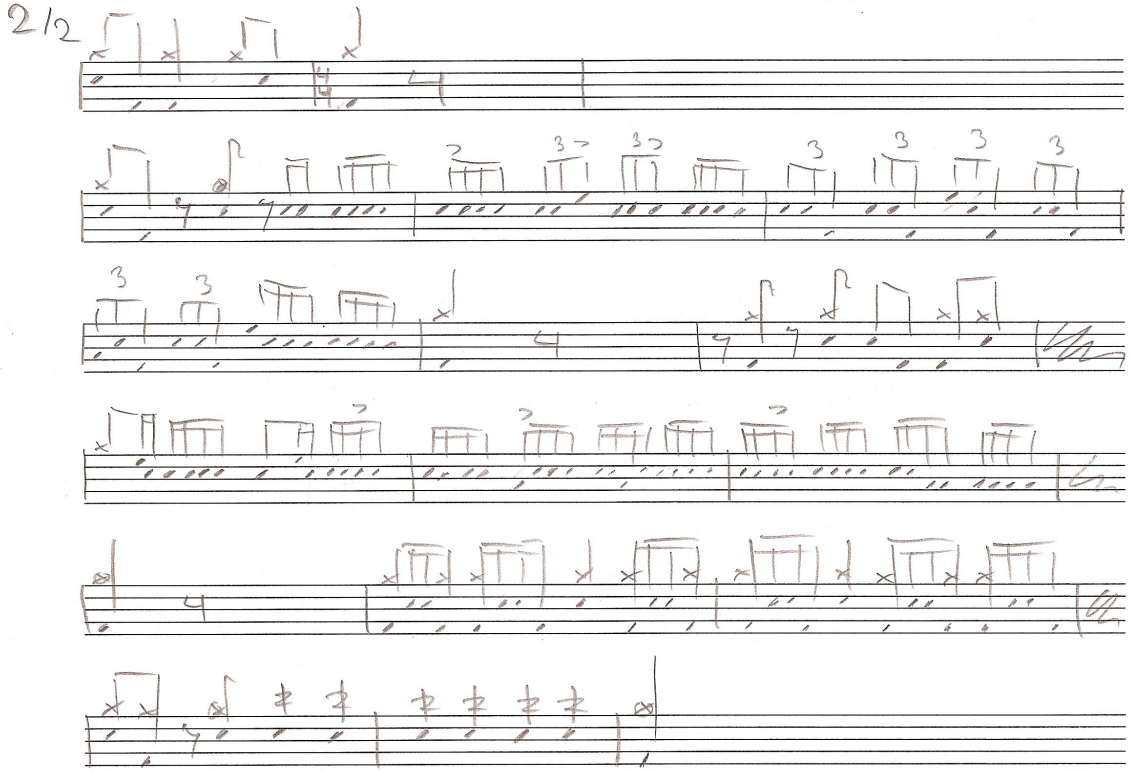


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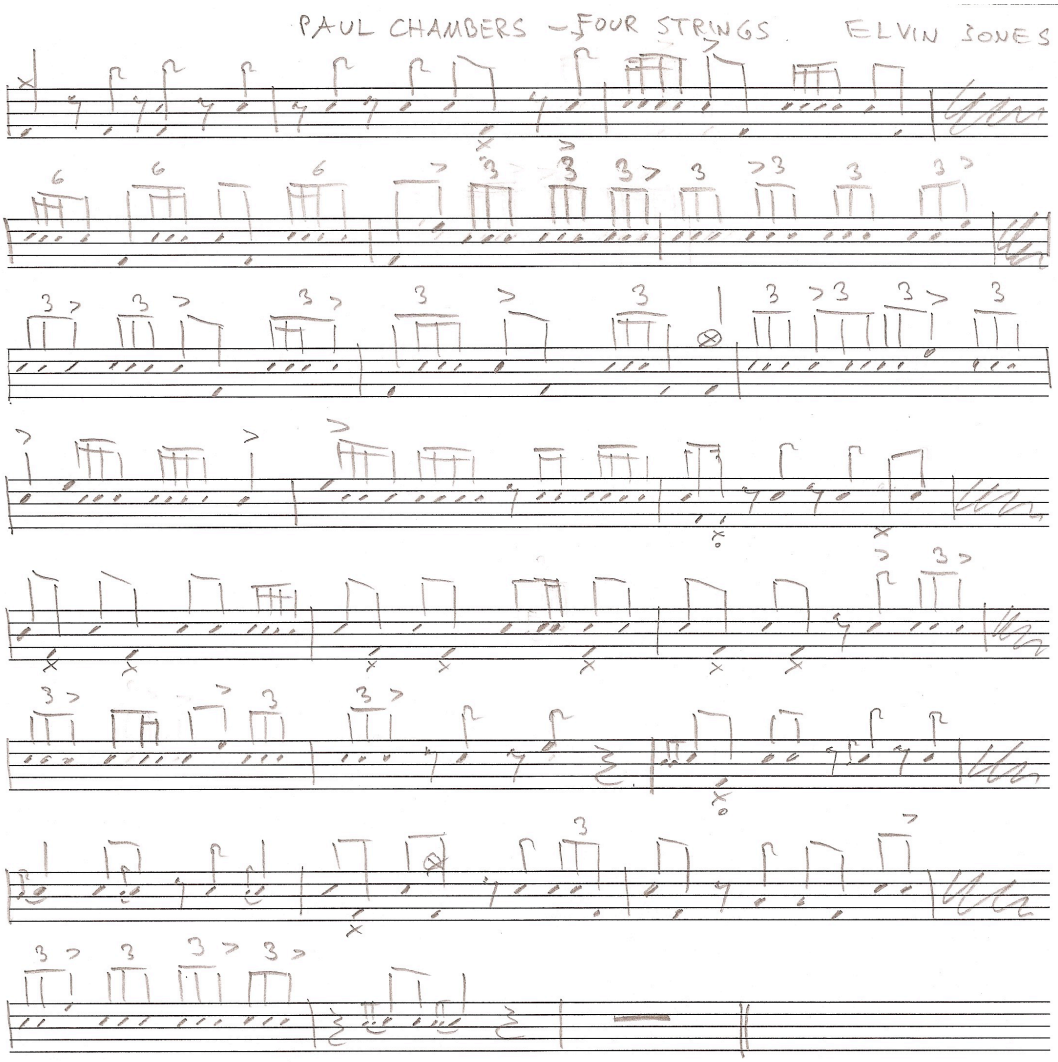


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ELVIN JONES - FOUR AND SIX



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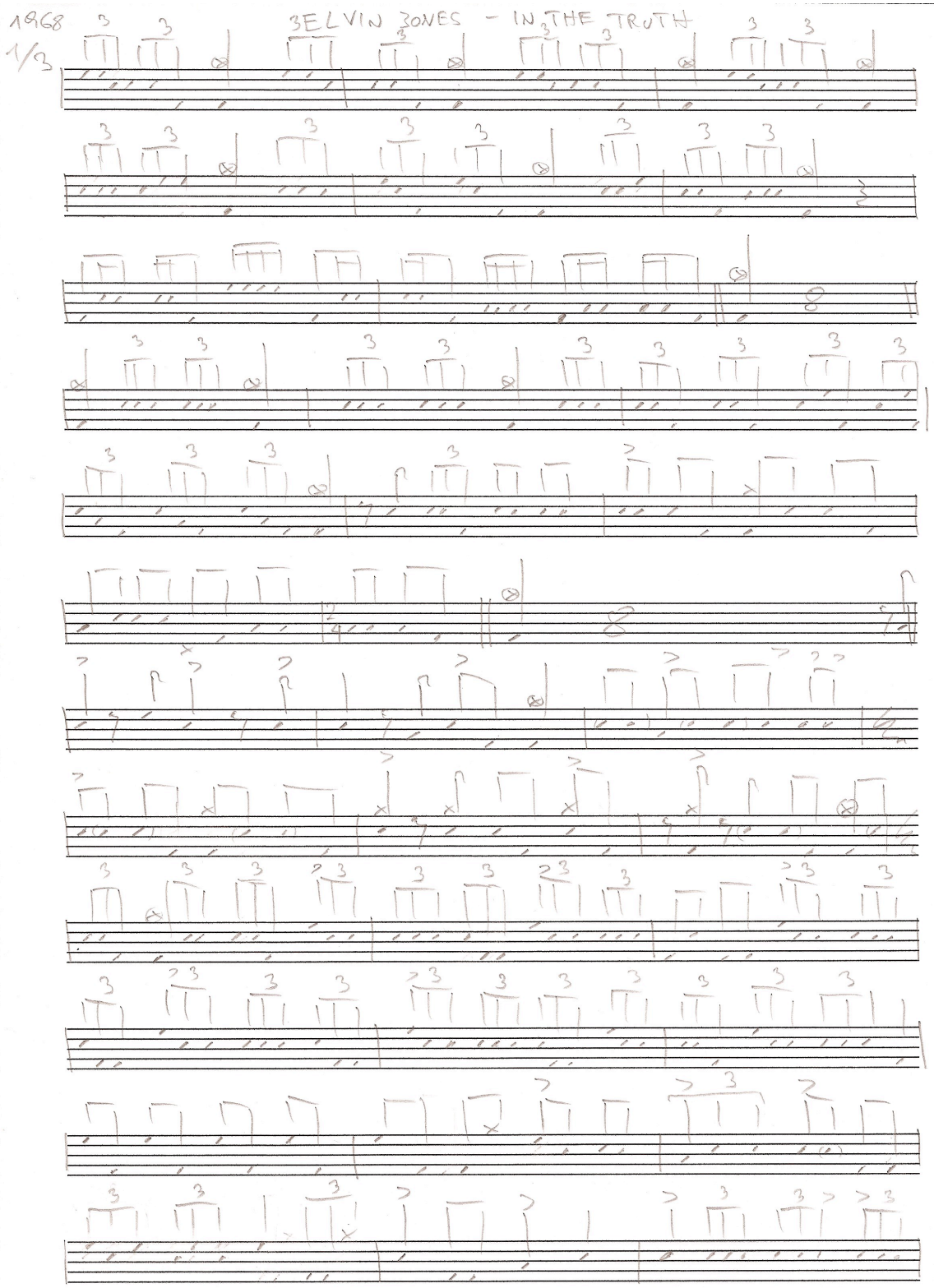
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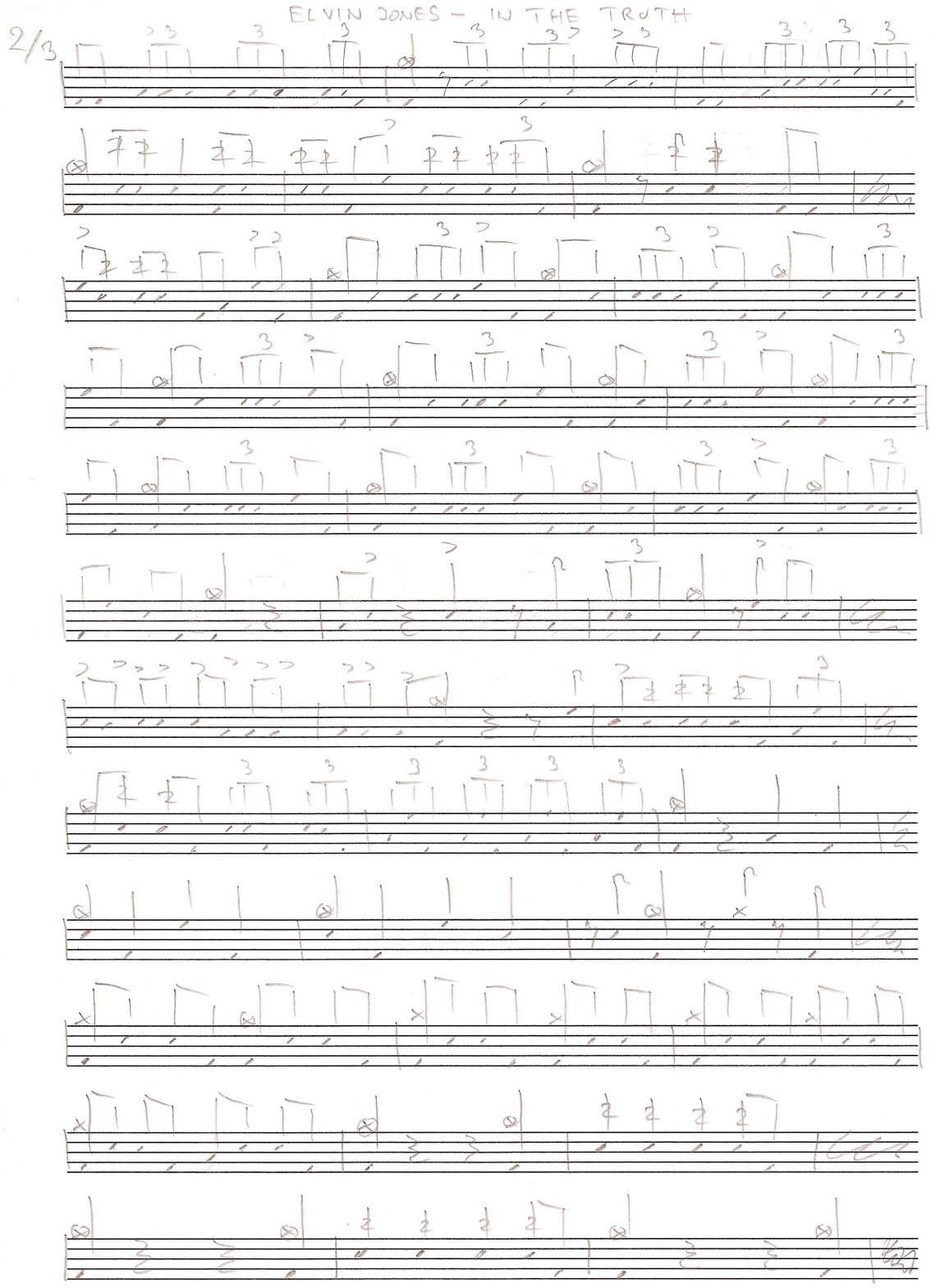
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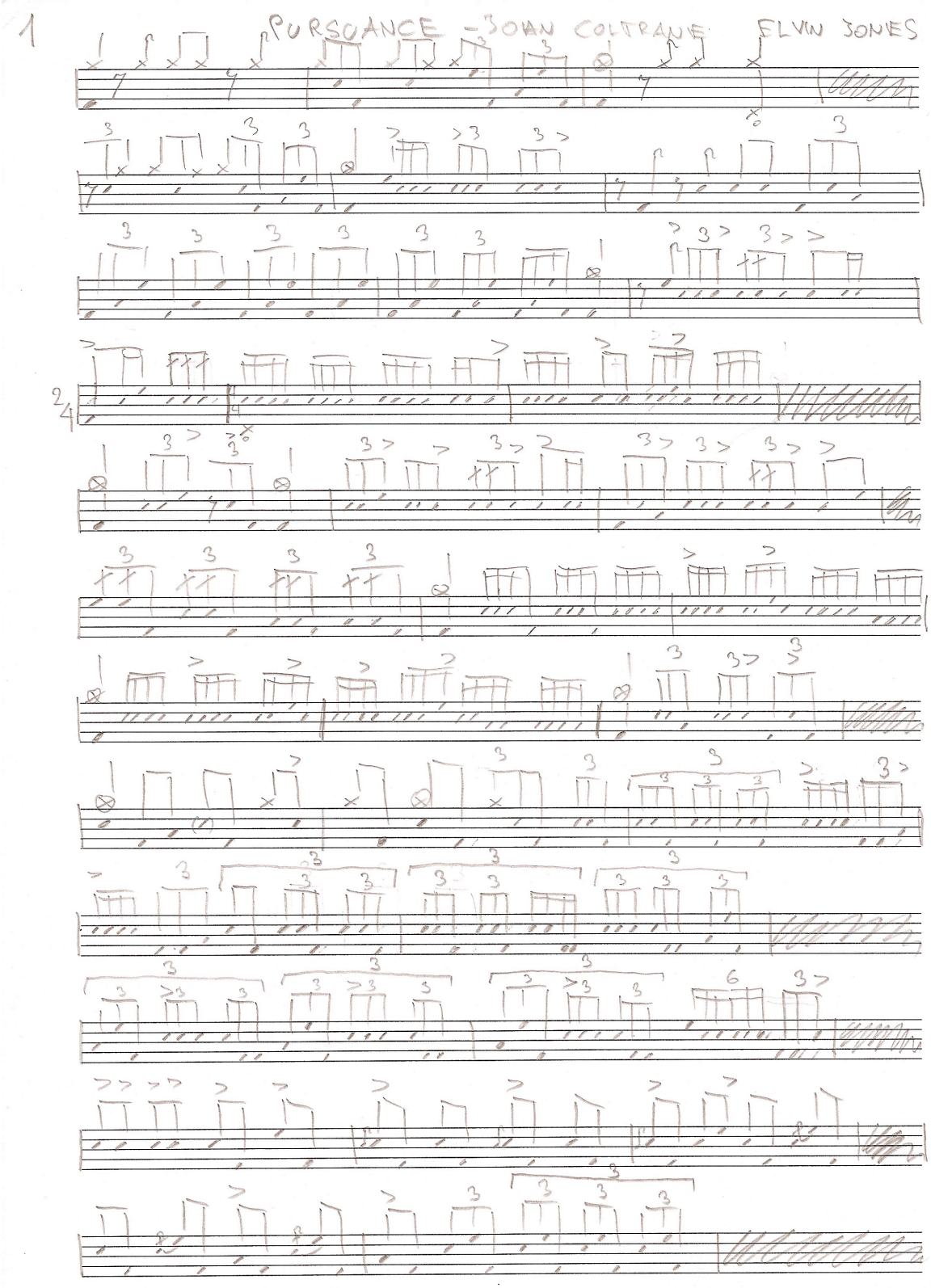
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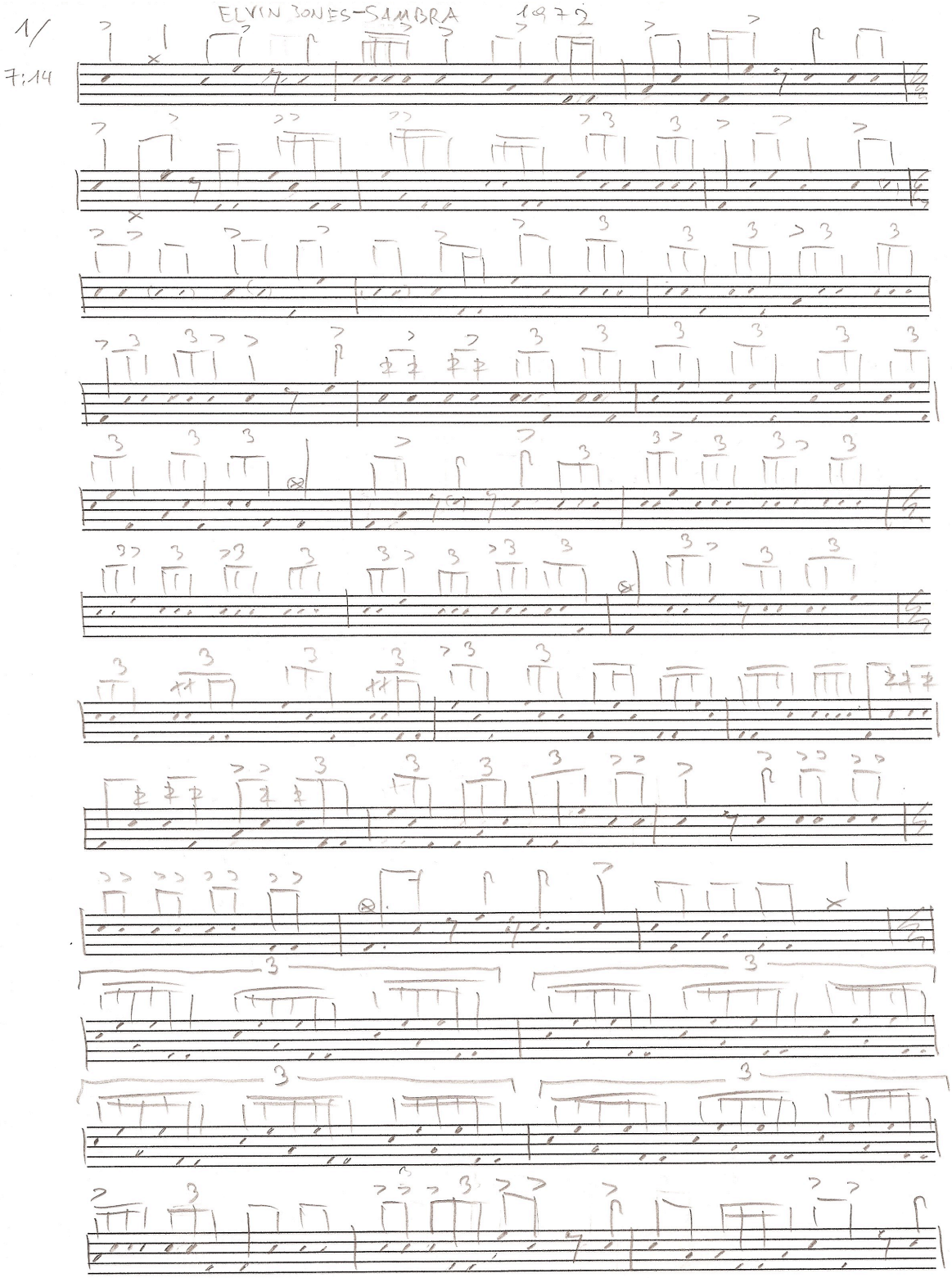
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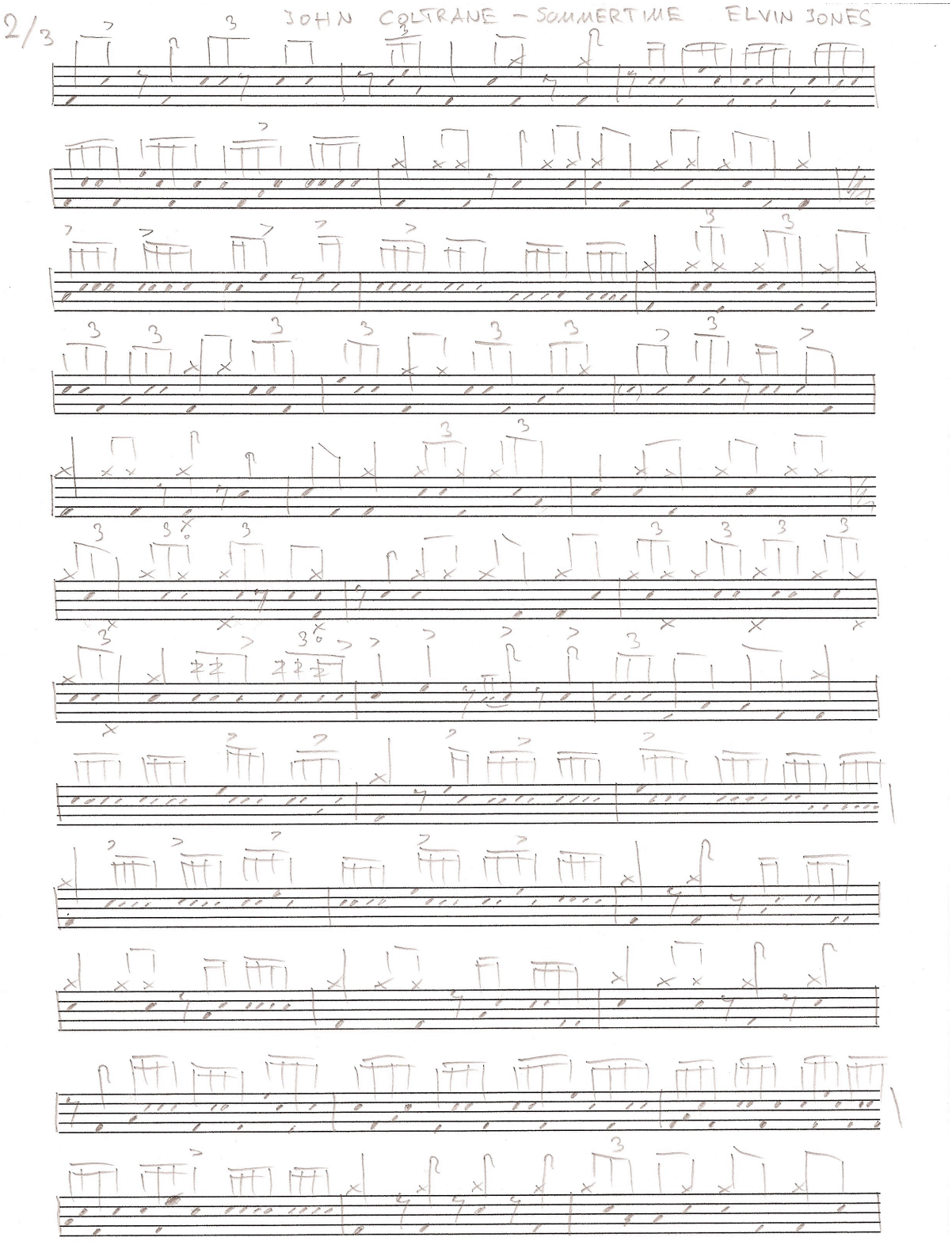
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ELVIN JONES - GRANT GREEN / ~~3OY S.~~ SPEAK LOW
A



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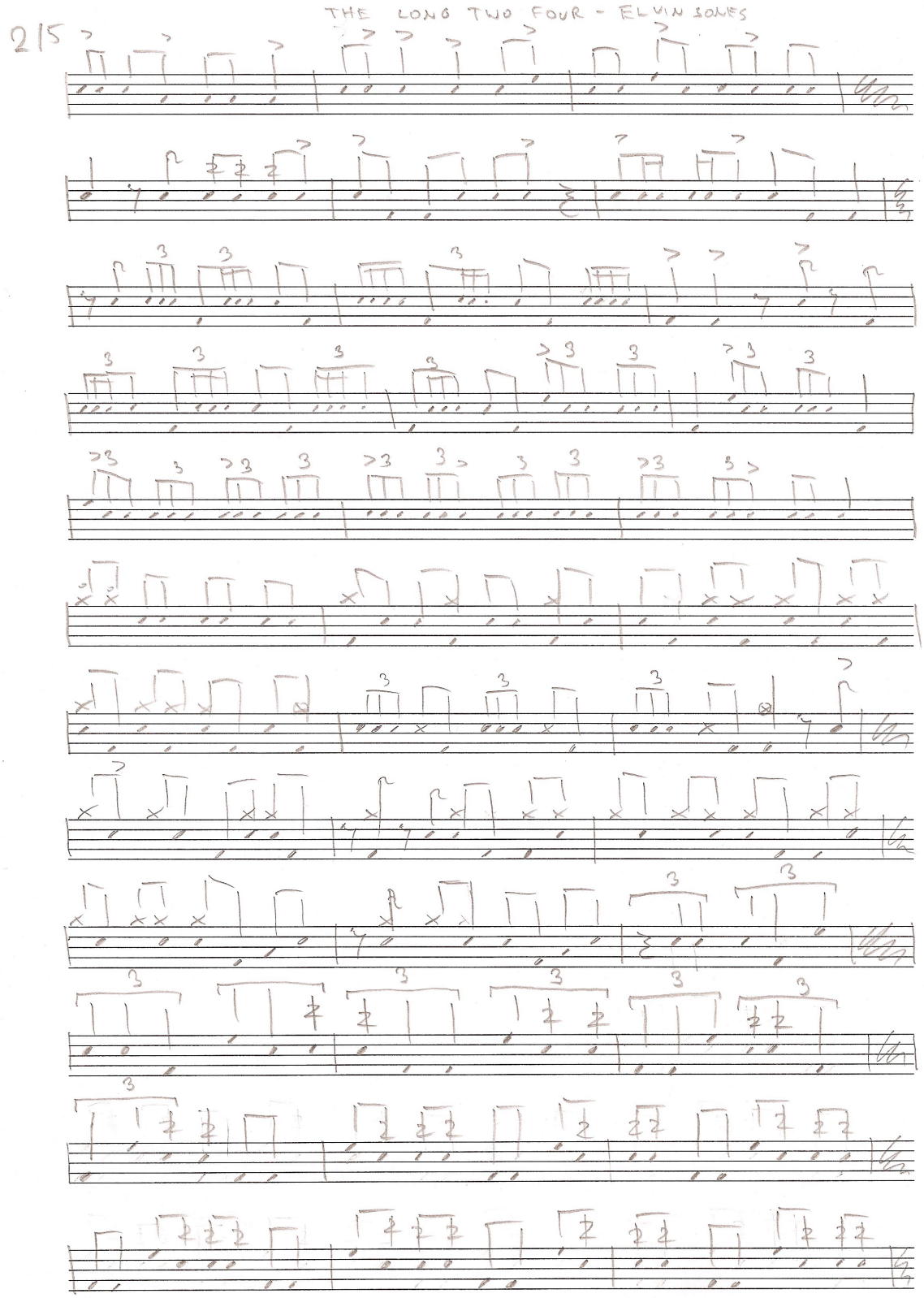
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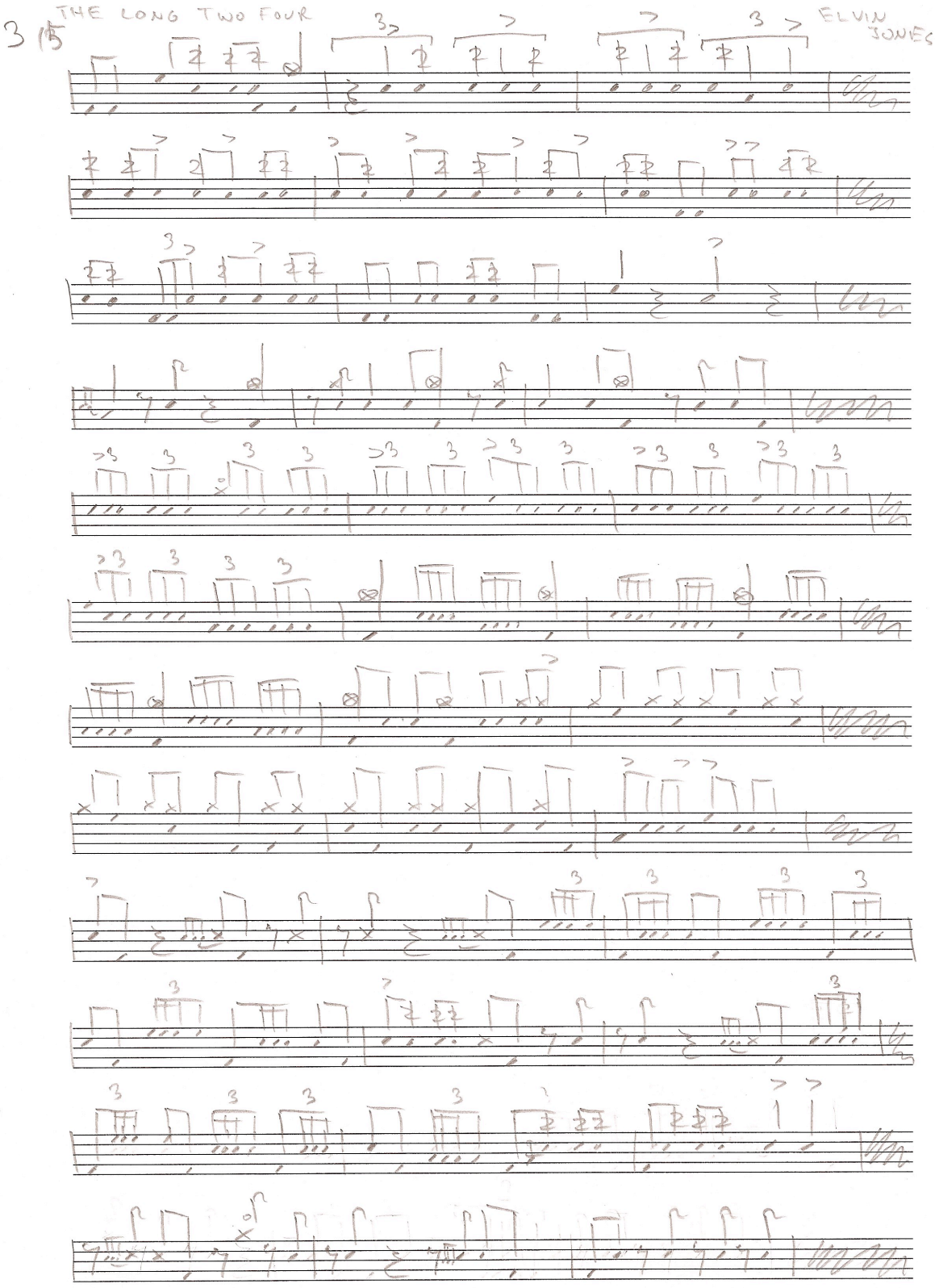
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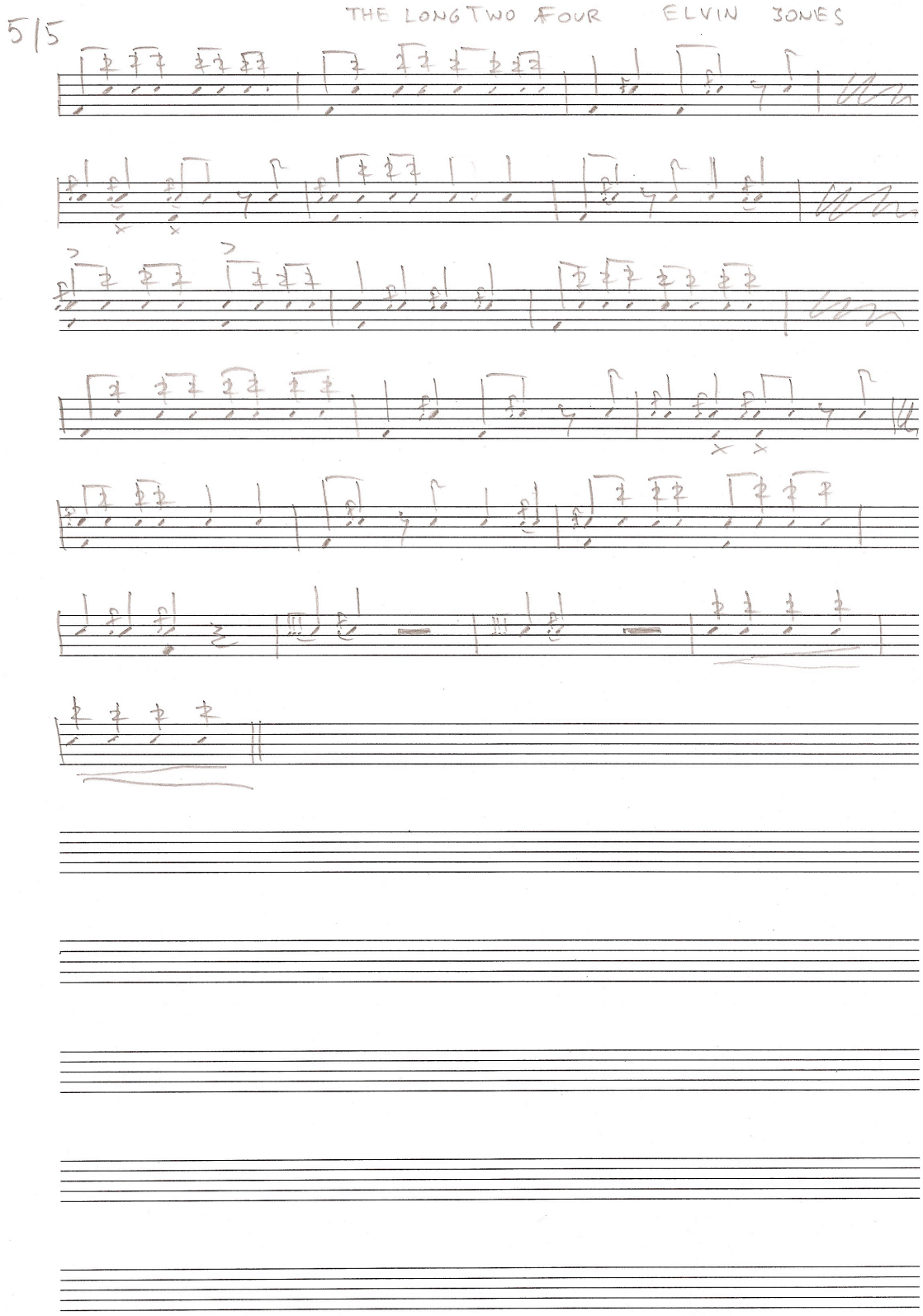
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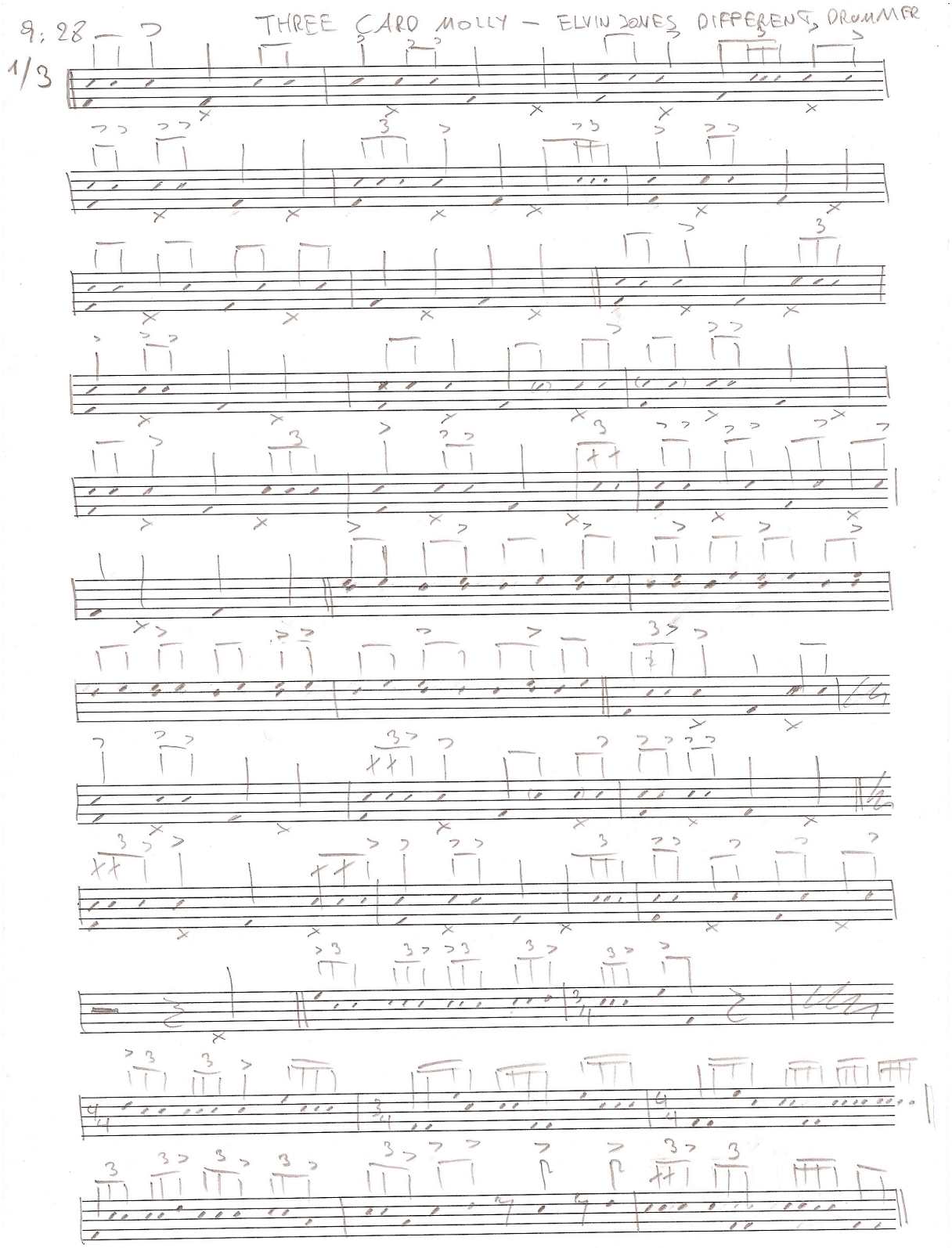
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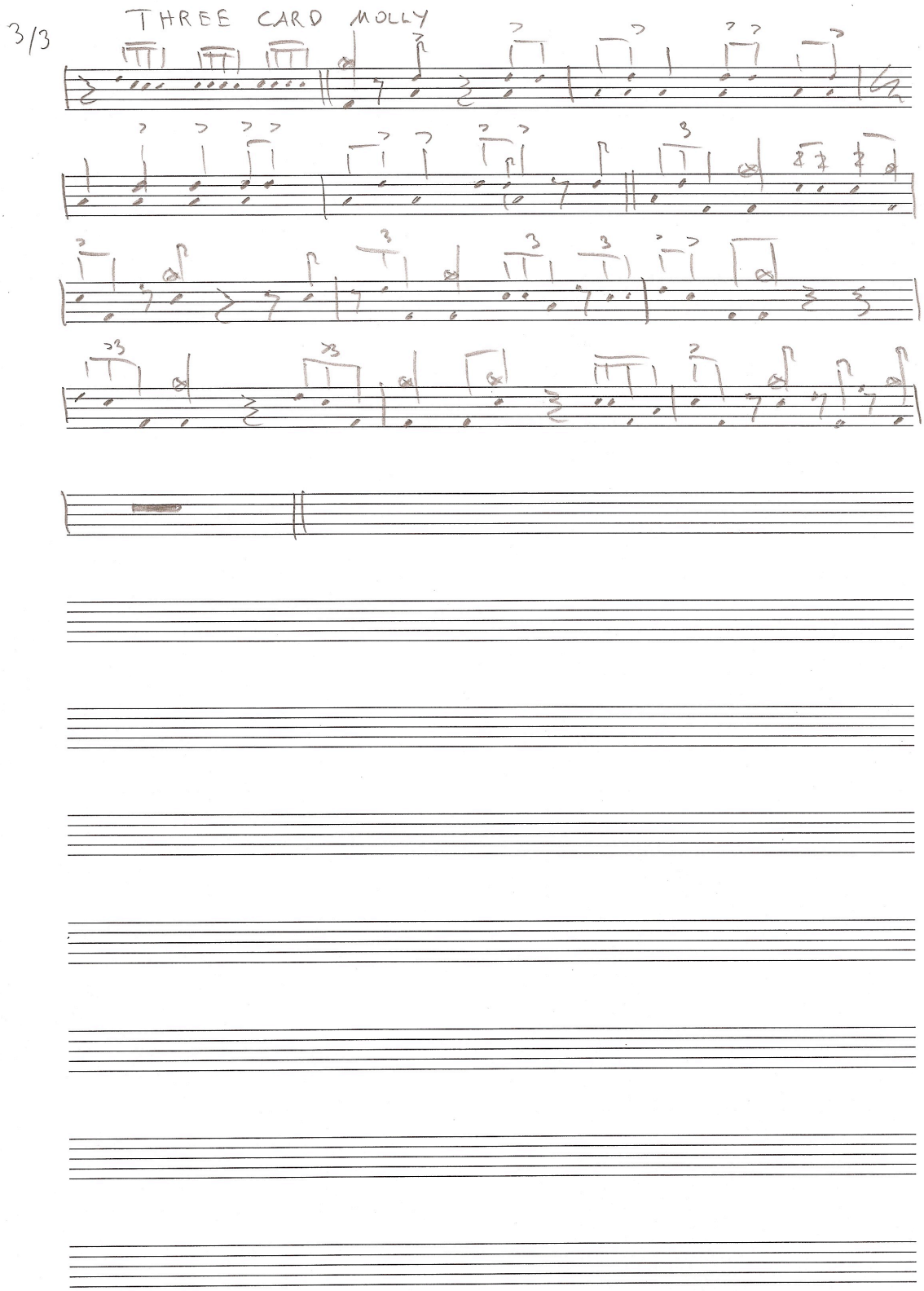
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THREE CARD MOLLY



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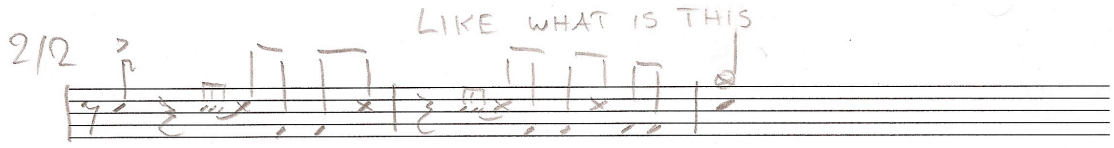
1/2

PEPPER ADAMS – THE COOL SOUND OF PEPPER ADAMS
LIKE... WHAT IS THIS ELVIN JONES

TRADING 8's

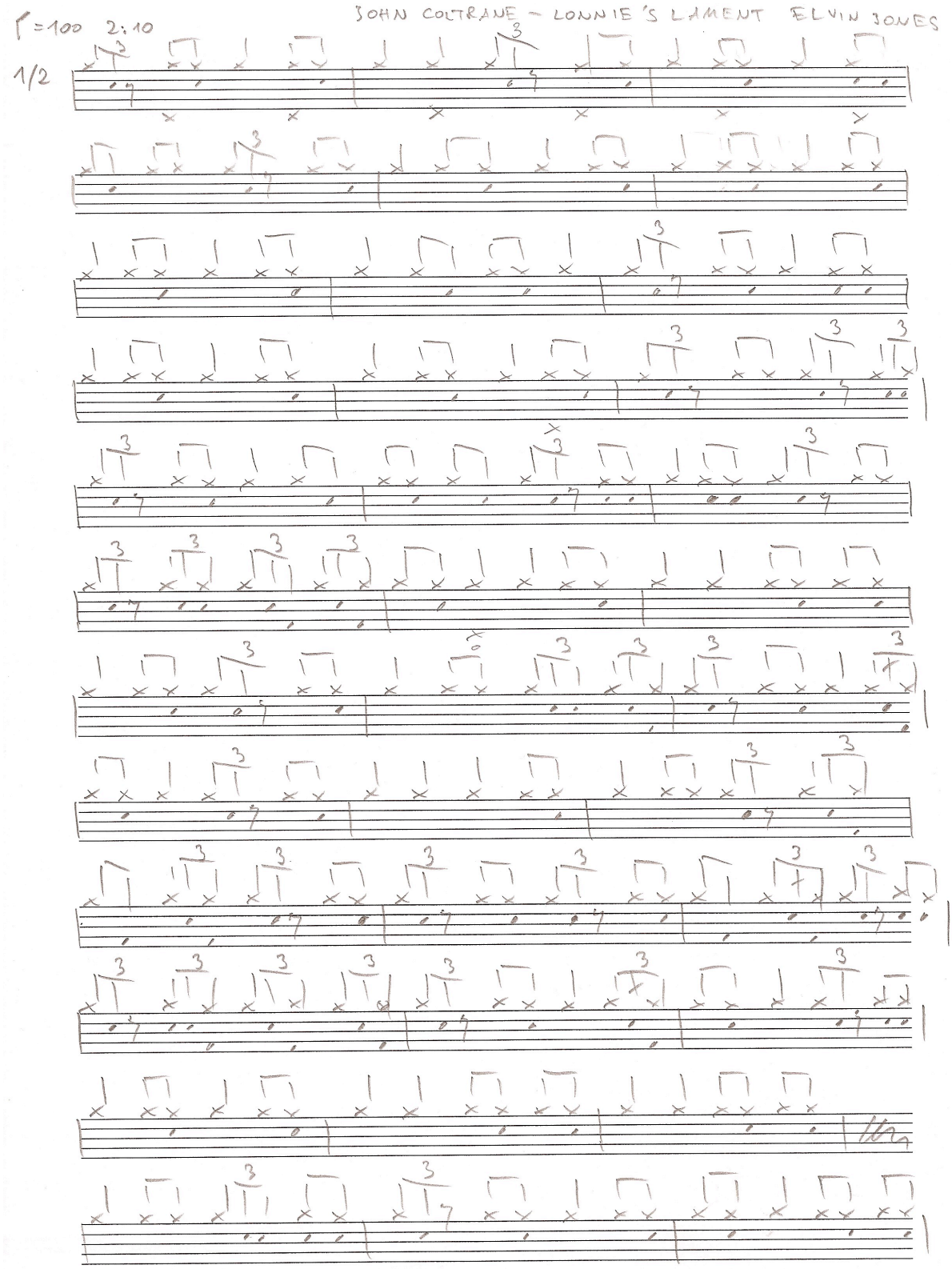


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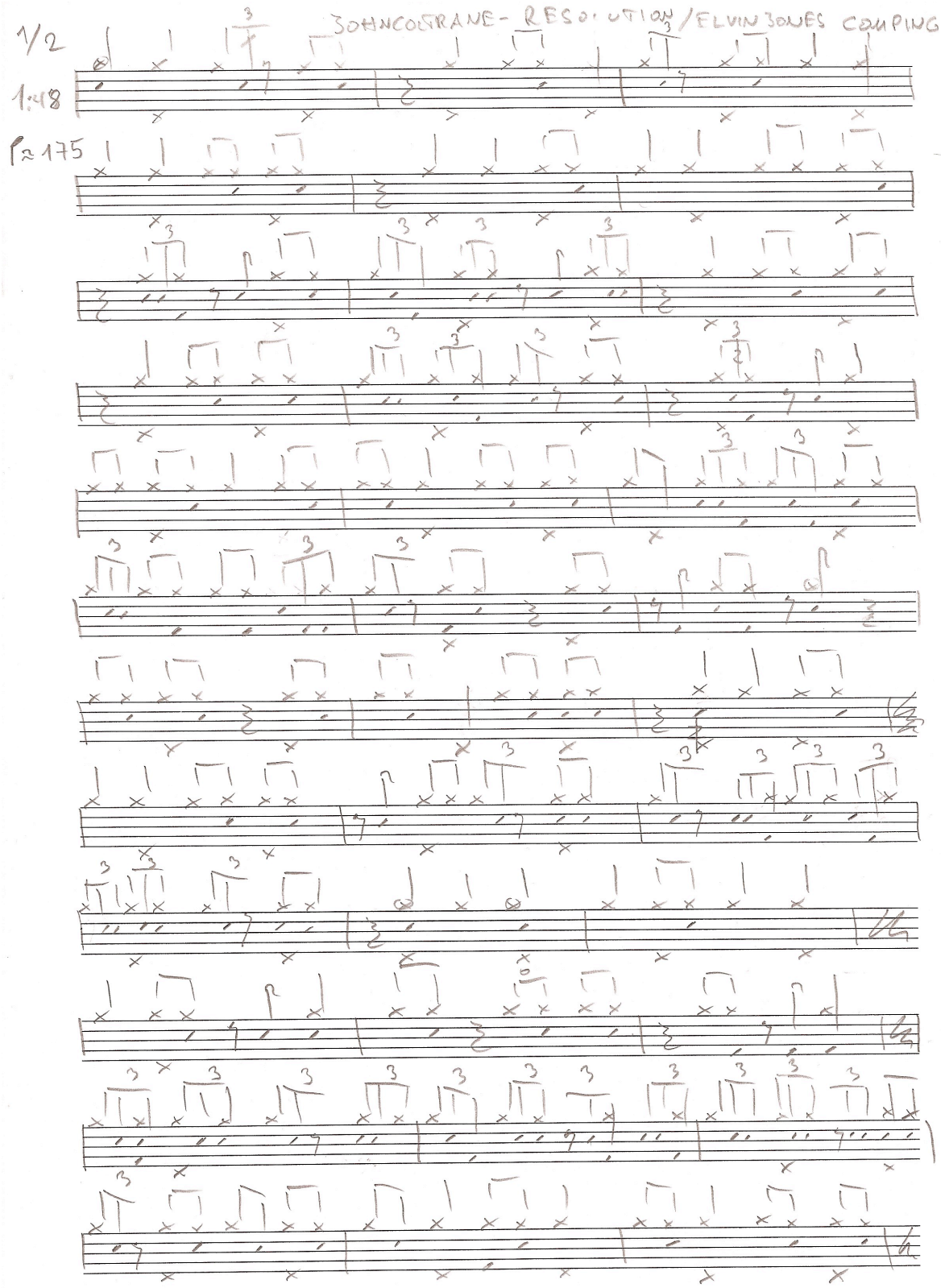
4.1.2.) Accompaniment



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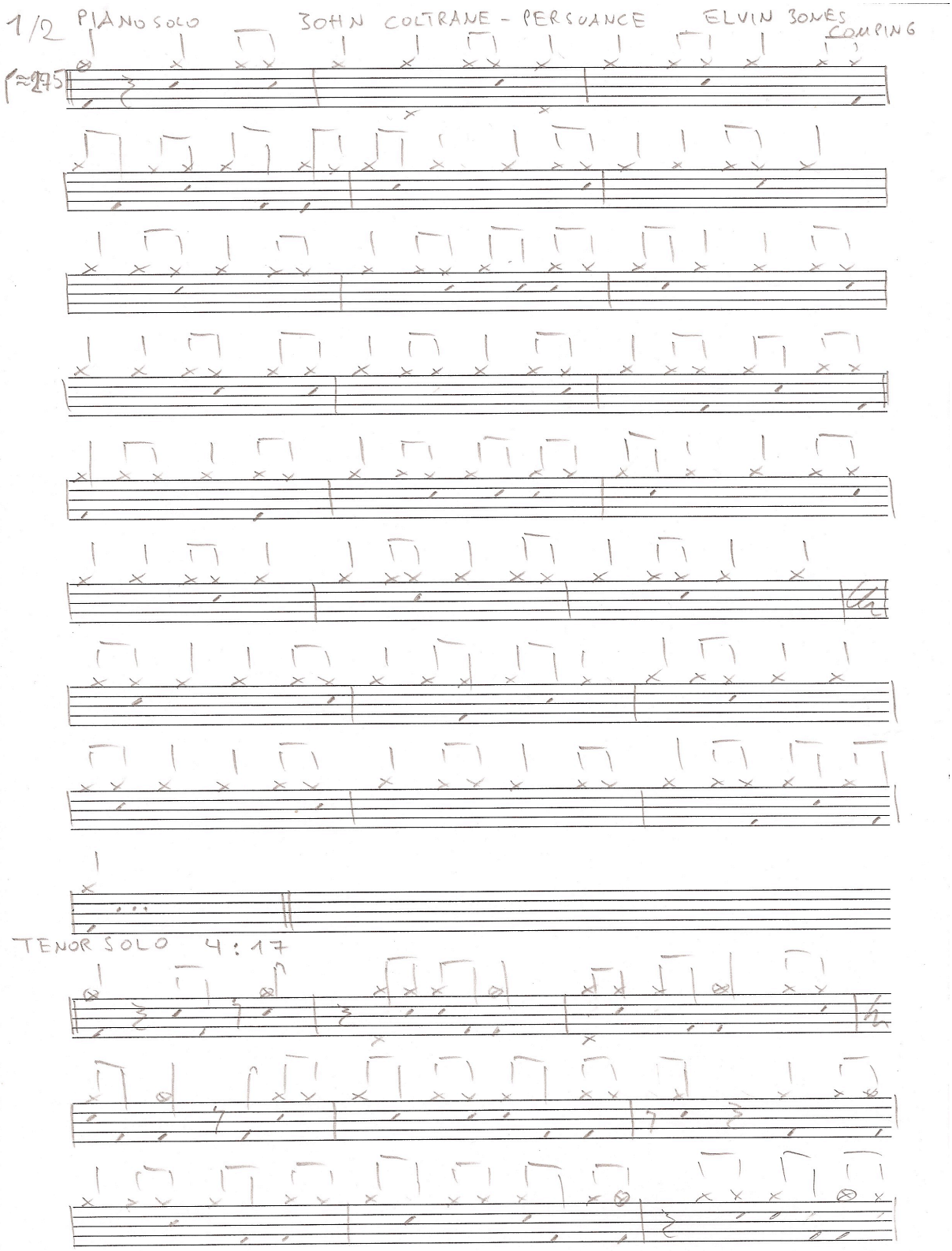
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RESOLUTION ELVIN JONES COMPING

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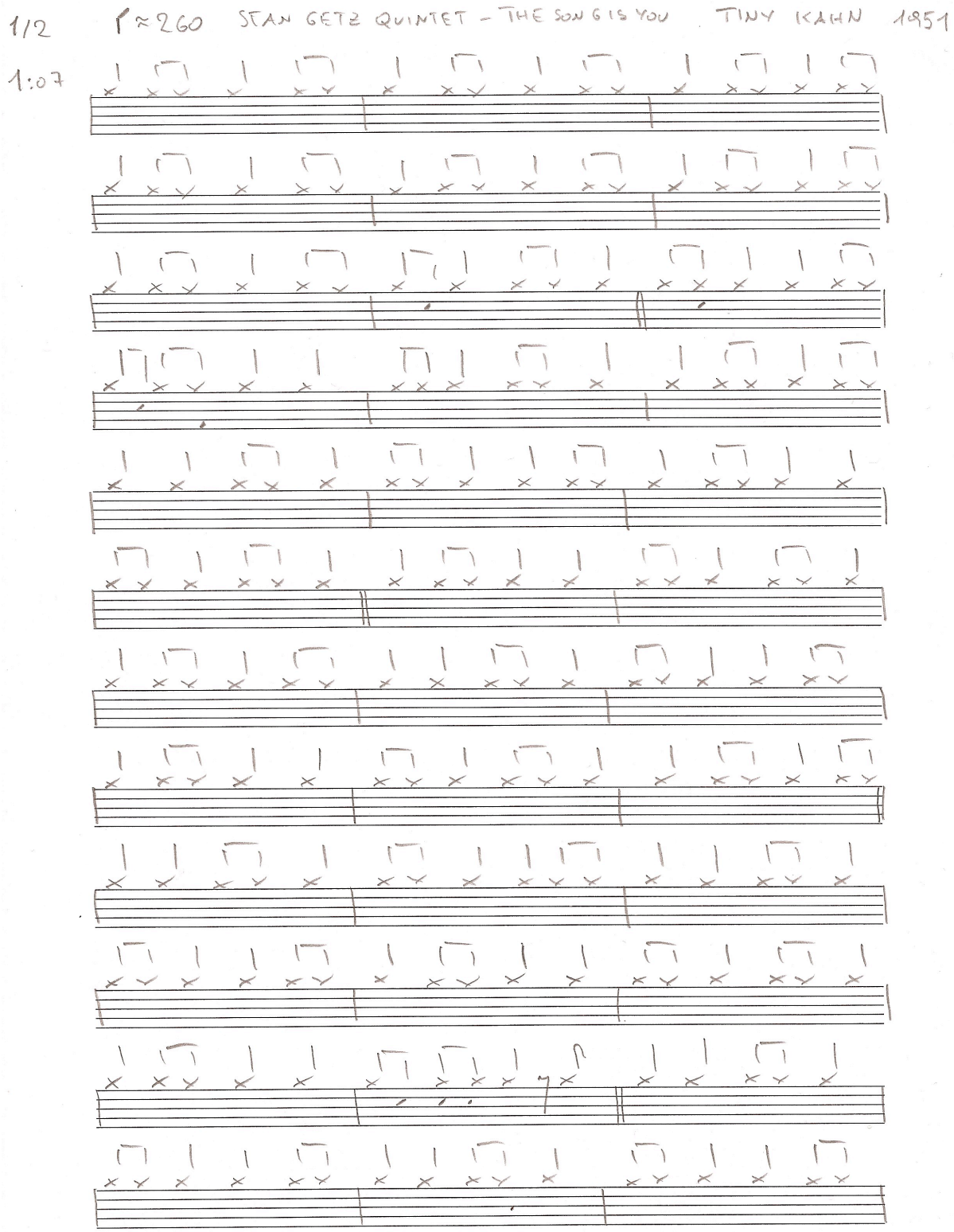


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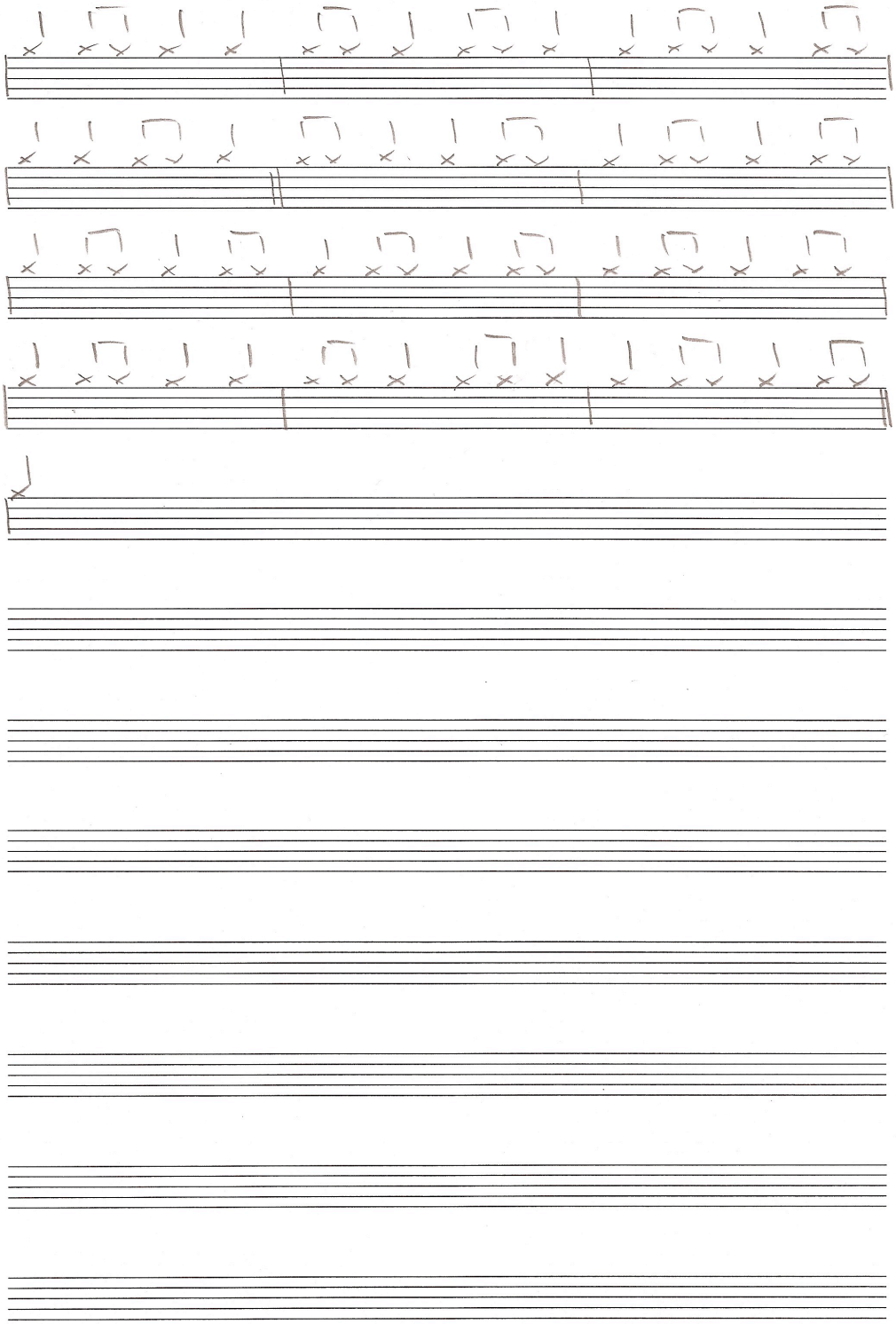
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4.2.) Tiny Kahn



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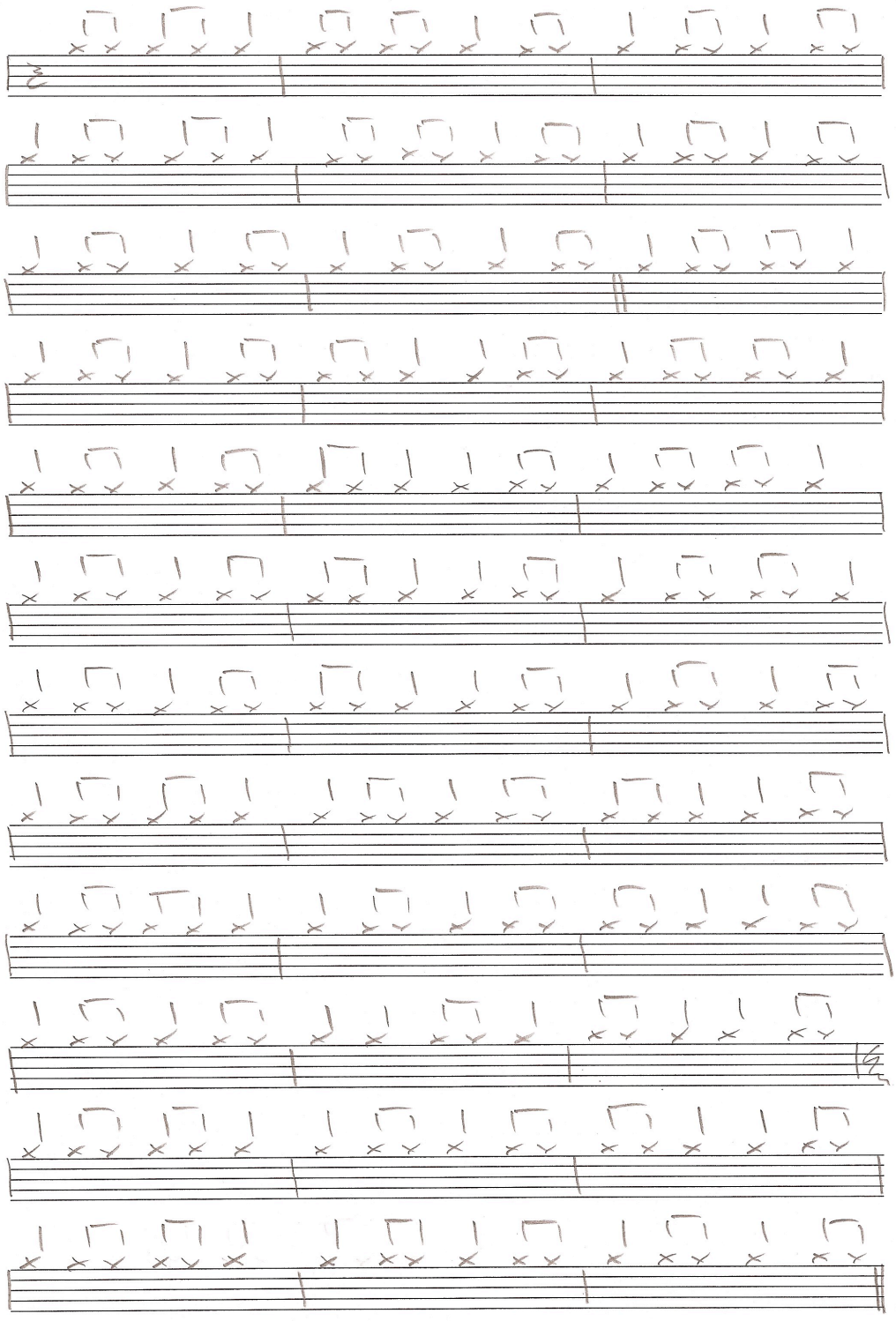
2/2 STAN GETZ - THE SONG IS YOU TINY KAHN 1951



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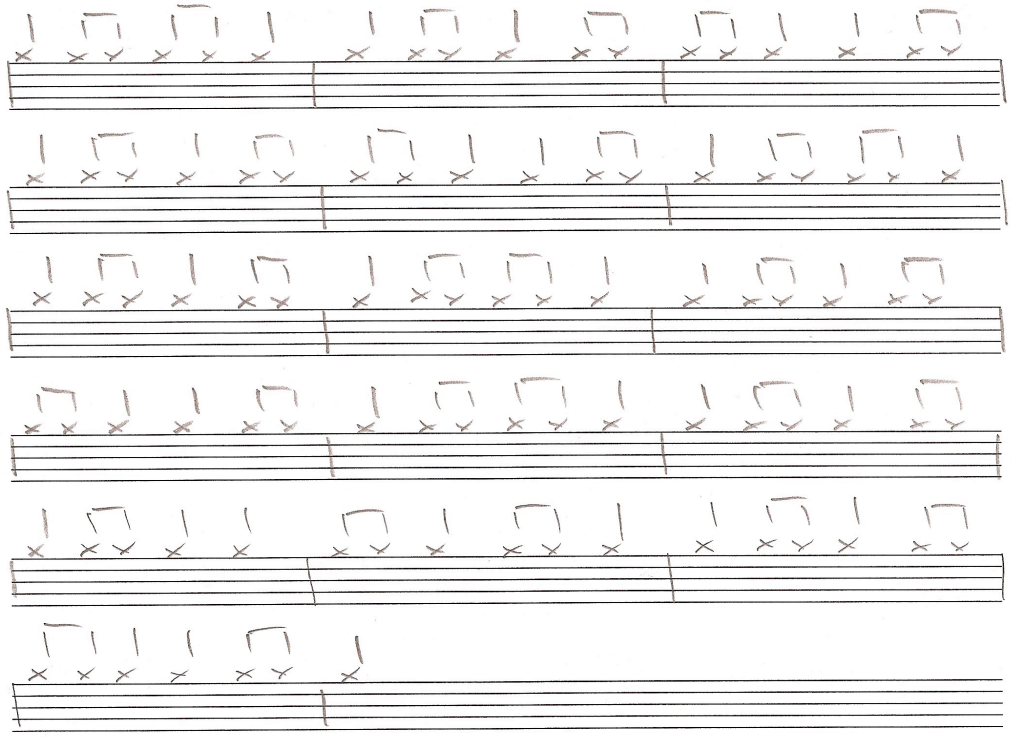
1/2 ♩≈200 STAN GETZ - THOU SWELL TINY KAHN 1951

0:48



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2/2 ♩≈200 STAN GETZ -THOU SWELL TINY KAHN 1951



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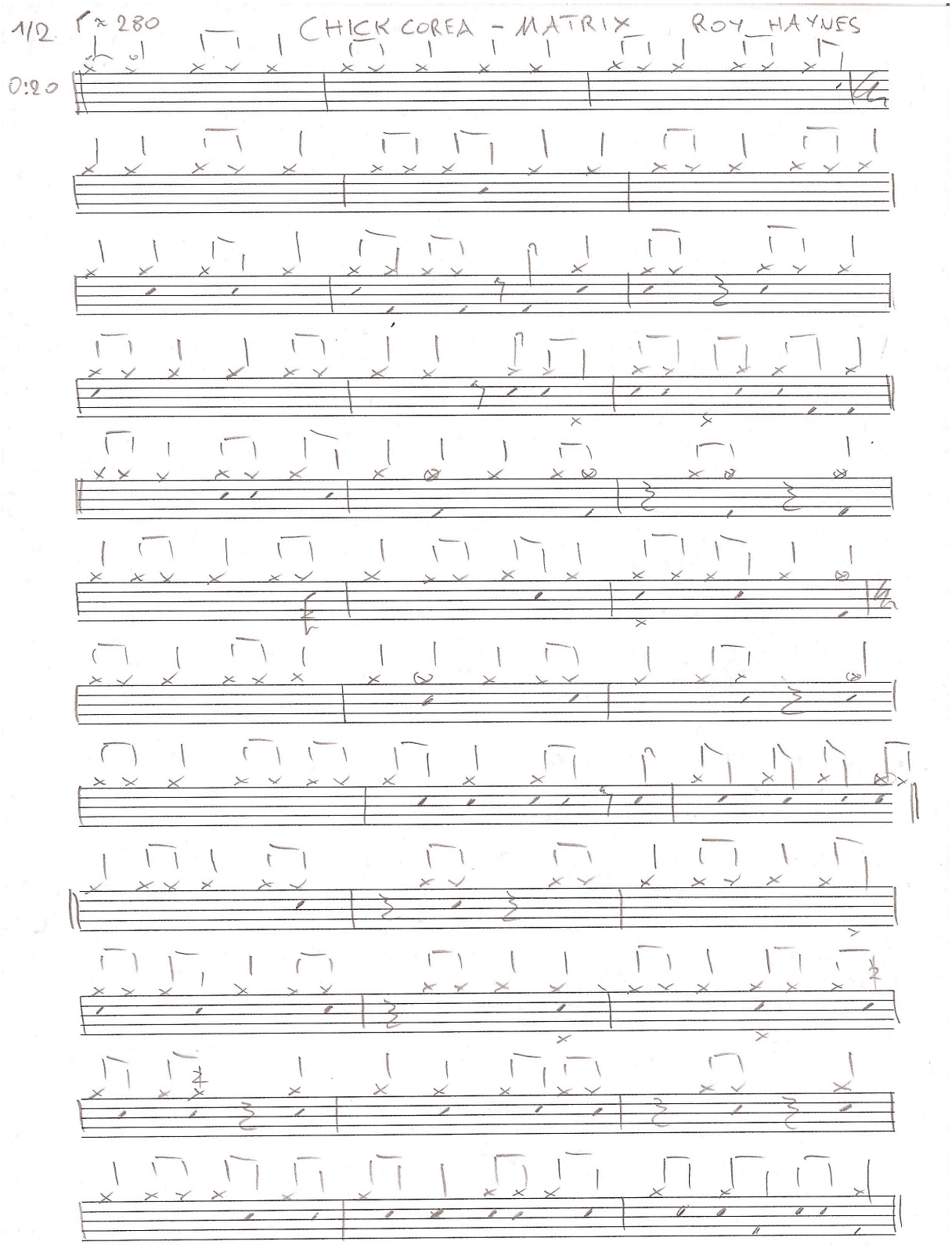
4.3.) Roy Haynes



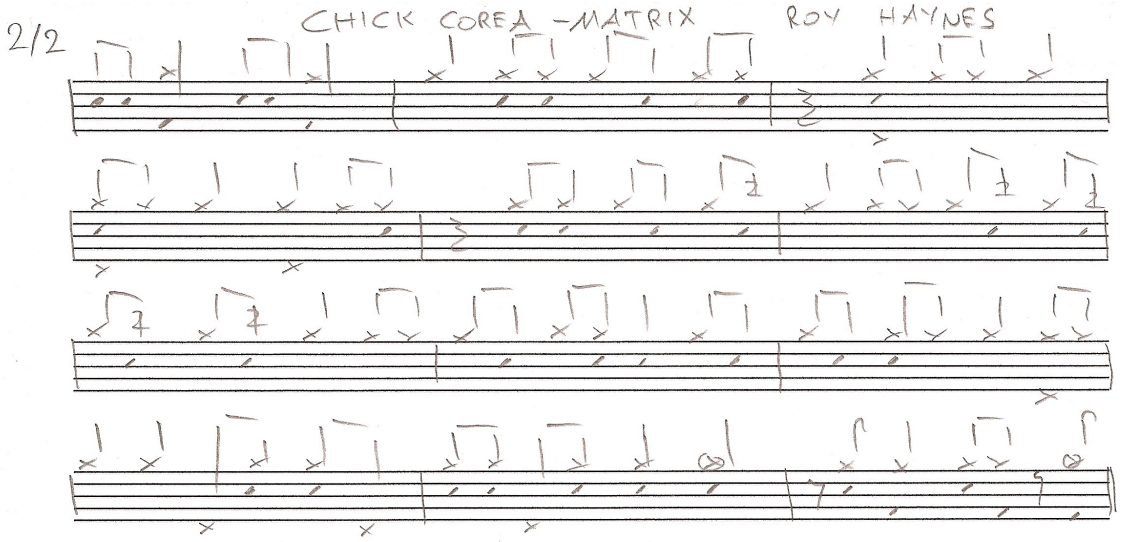
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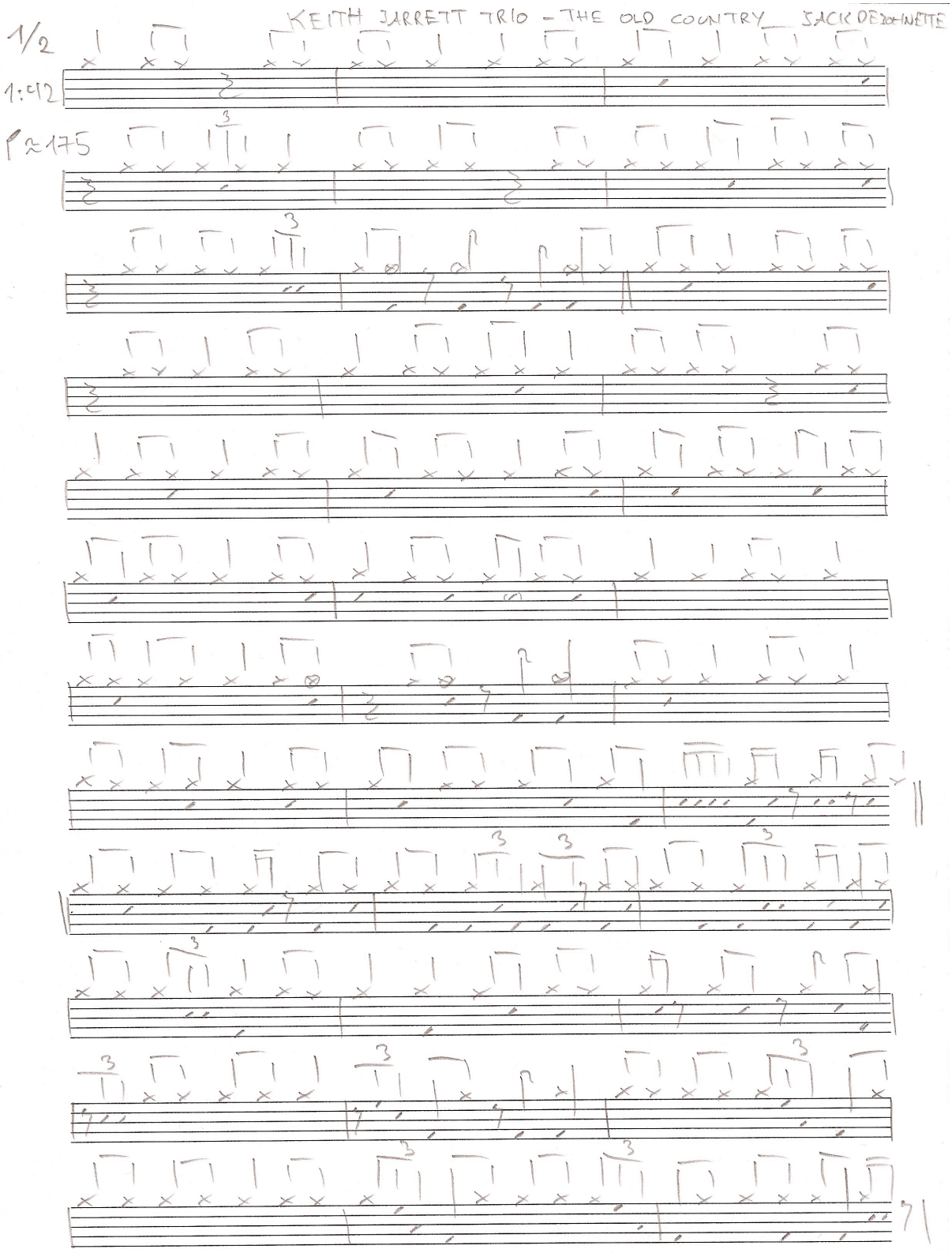


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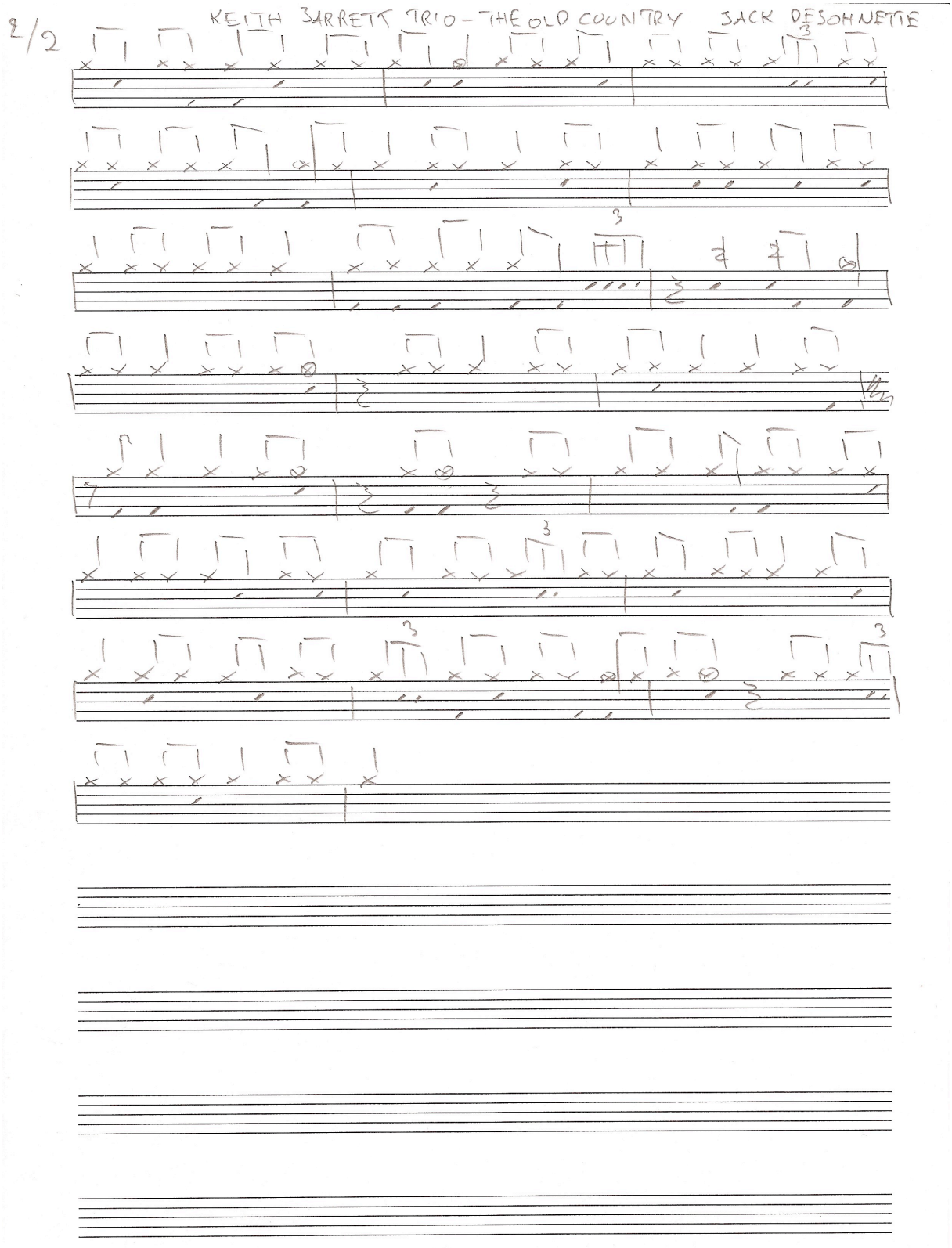
4.4.) Jack Dejohnette



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SOE LOVANO - JOSIE & ROSIE SACK OF JOHNETTE

5:50





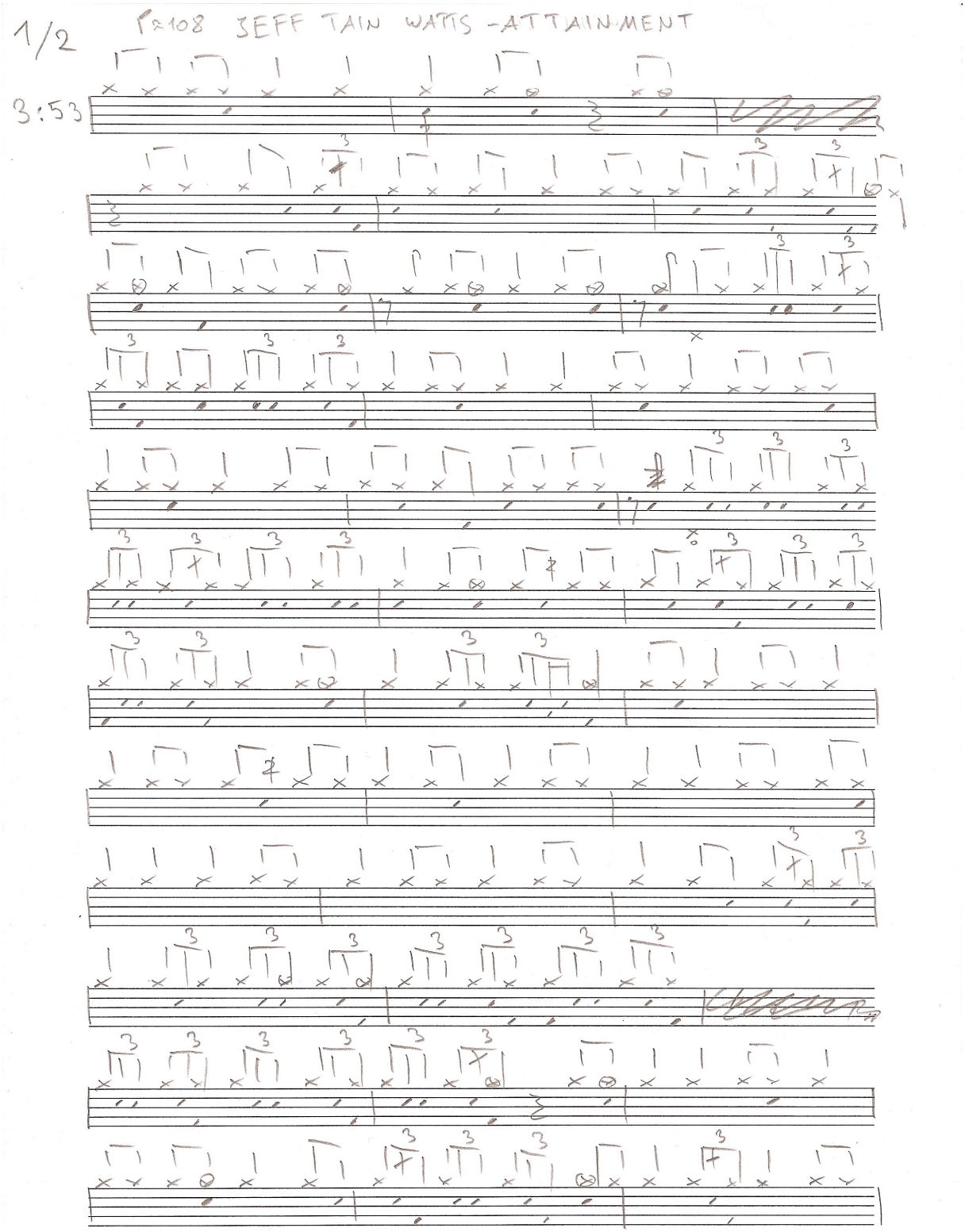
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2/2 KEITH JARRETT TRIO - ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE JACK DEJOHNETTE



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4.5.) Jeff 'Tain' Watts



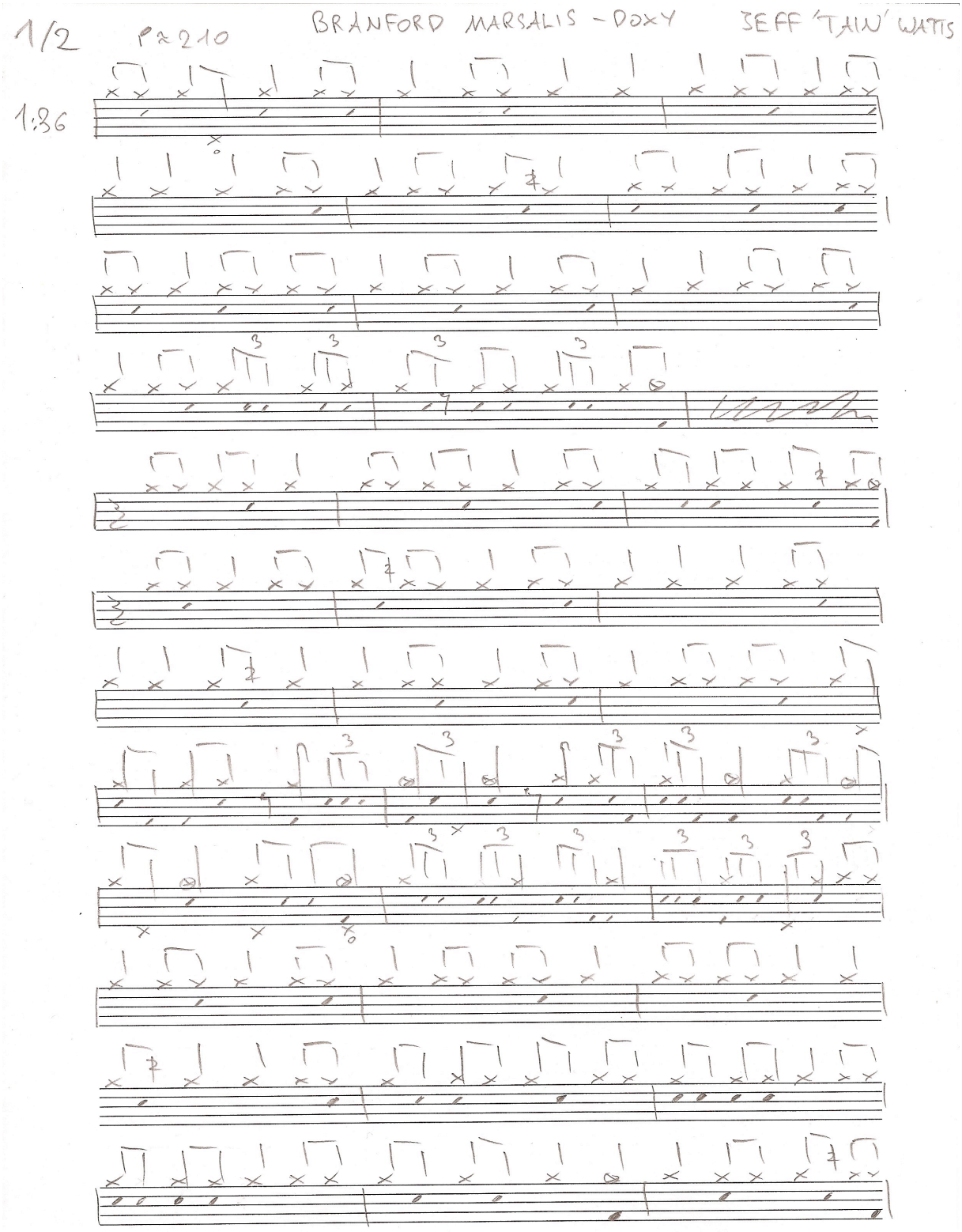
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JEFF TAIN WATTS - ATTAINMENT



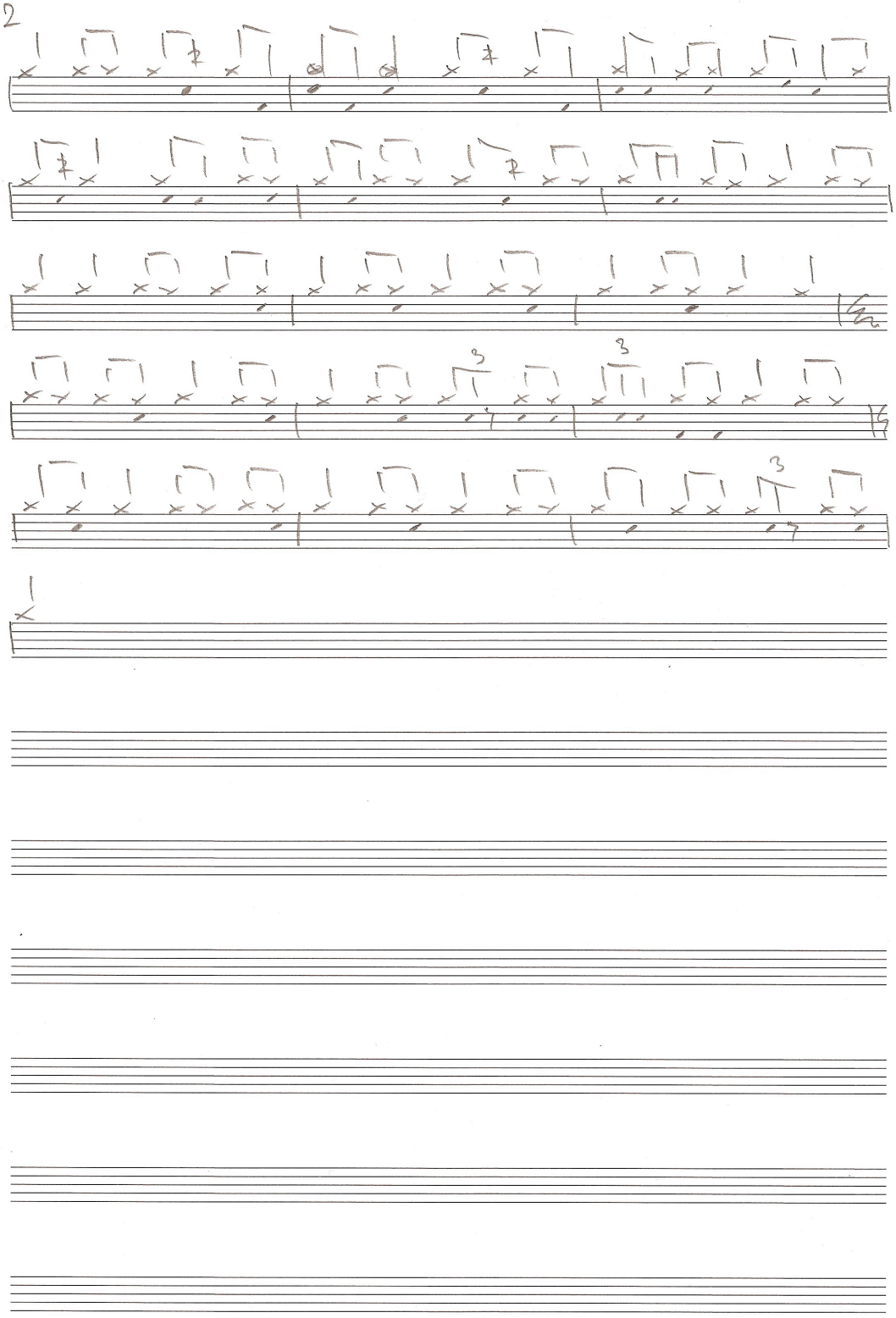
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BRANFORD MARSALIS - DOXY JEFF 'TAIN' WATTS

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BRANFORD MARSALIS – TAIN MUTINY
JEFF 'TAIN' WATTS



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4.6.) Brian Blade



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BRIAN BLADE - BILLY CHILD'S QUARTET



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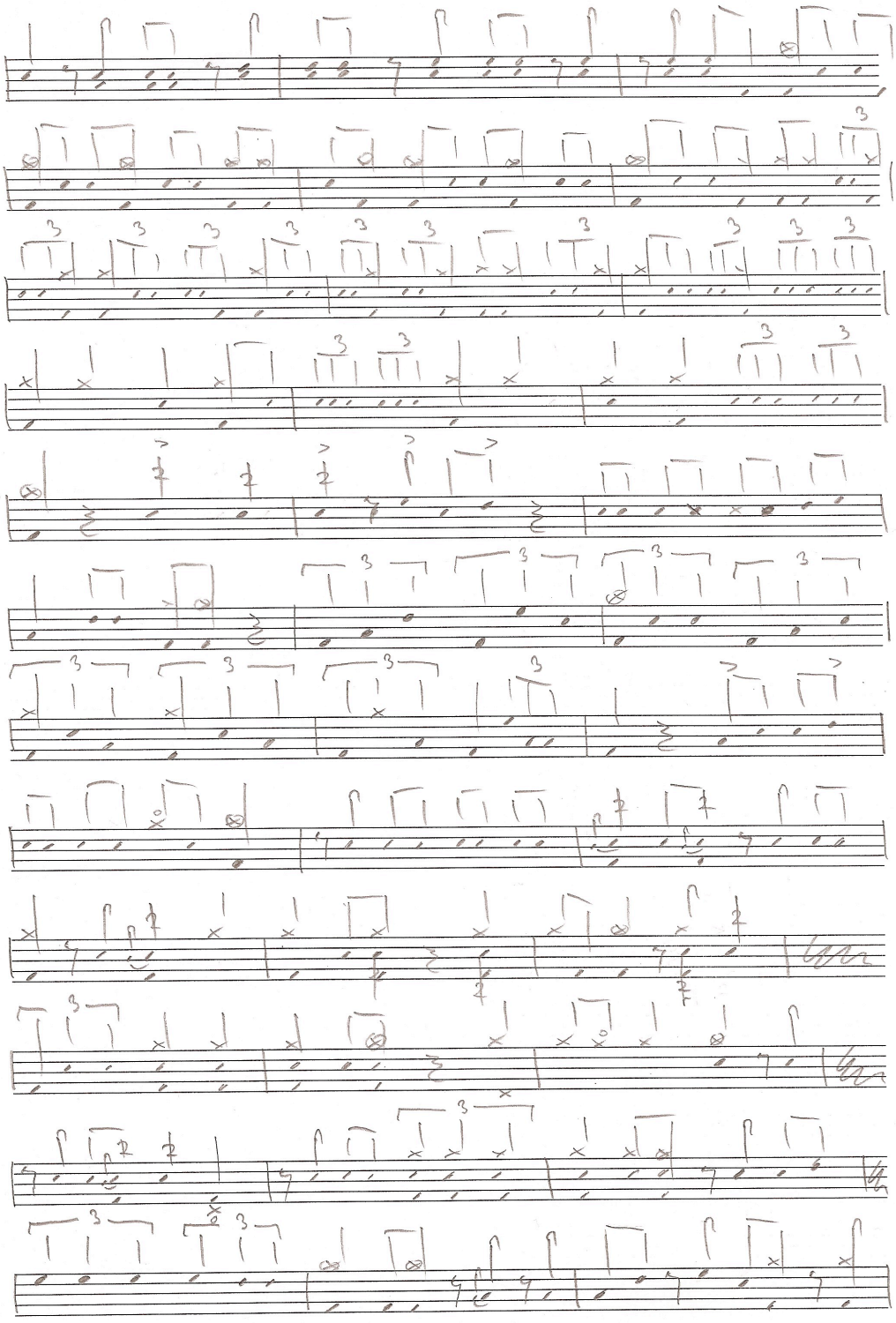
BRIAN BLADE - I HEARARHAPSODY



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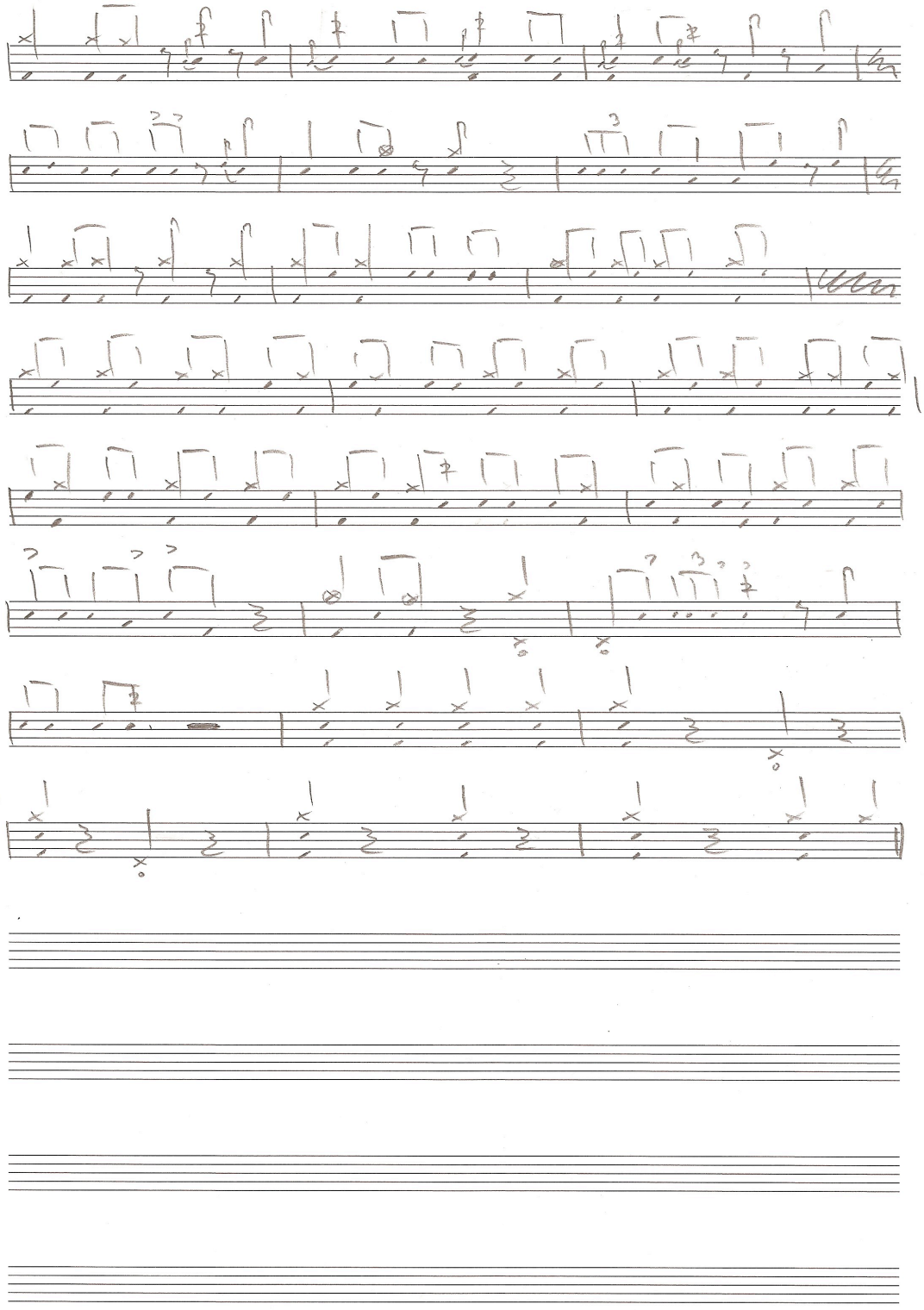
BRIAN BLADE - I HEAR A RHAPSODY



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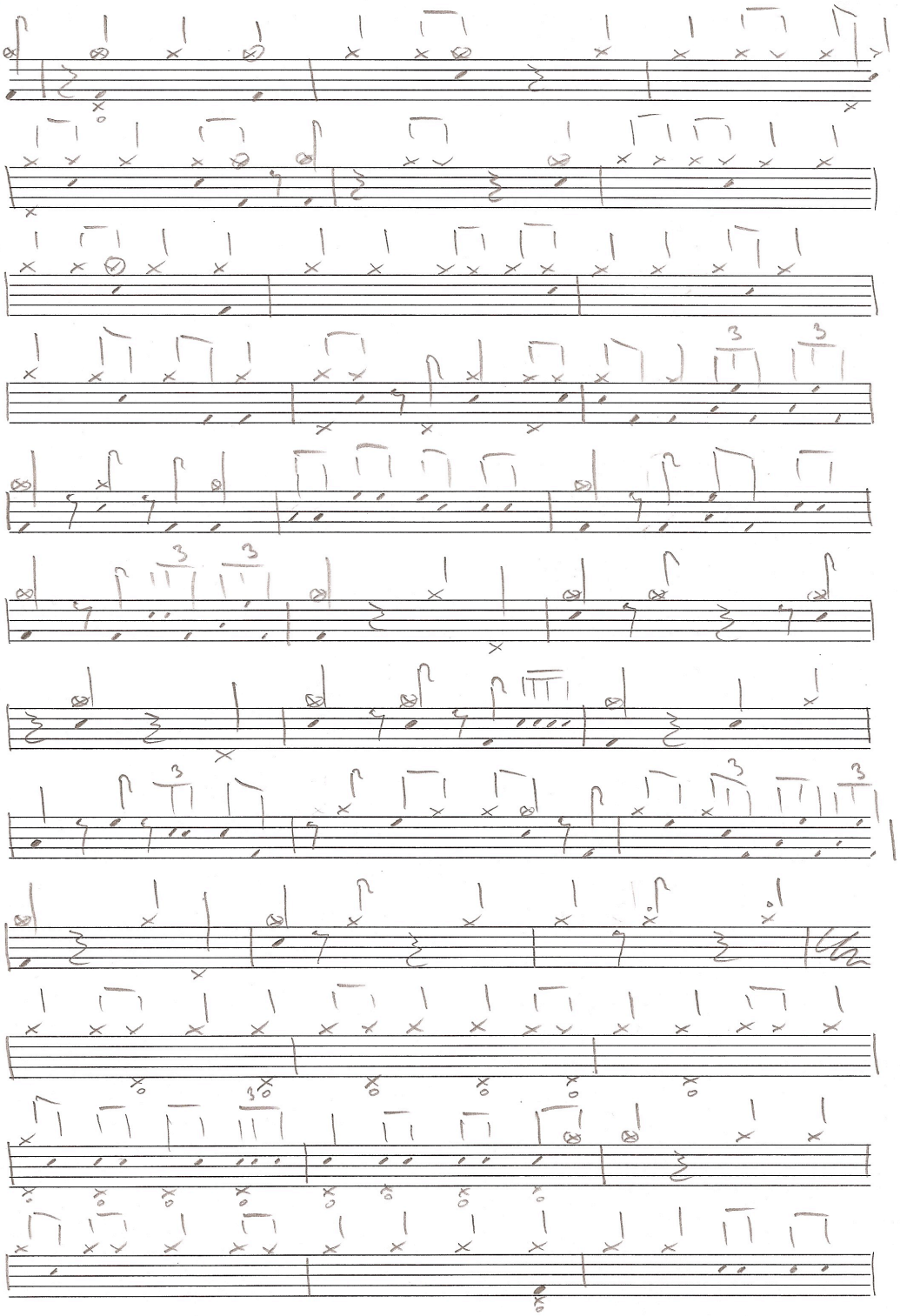
BRIAN BLADE – I HEARARHAPSODY



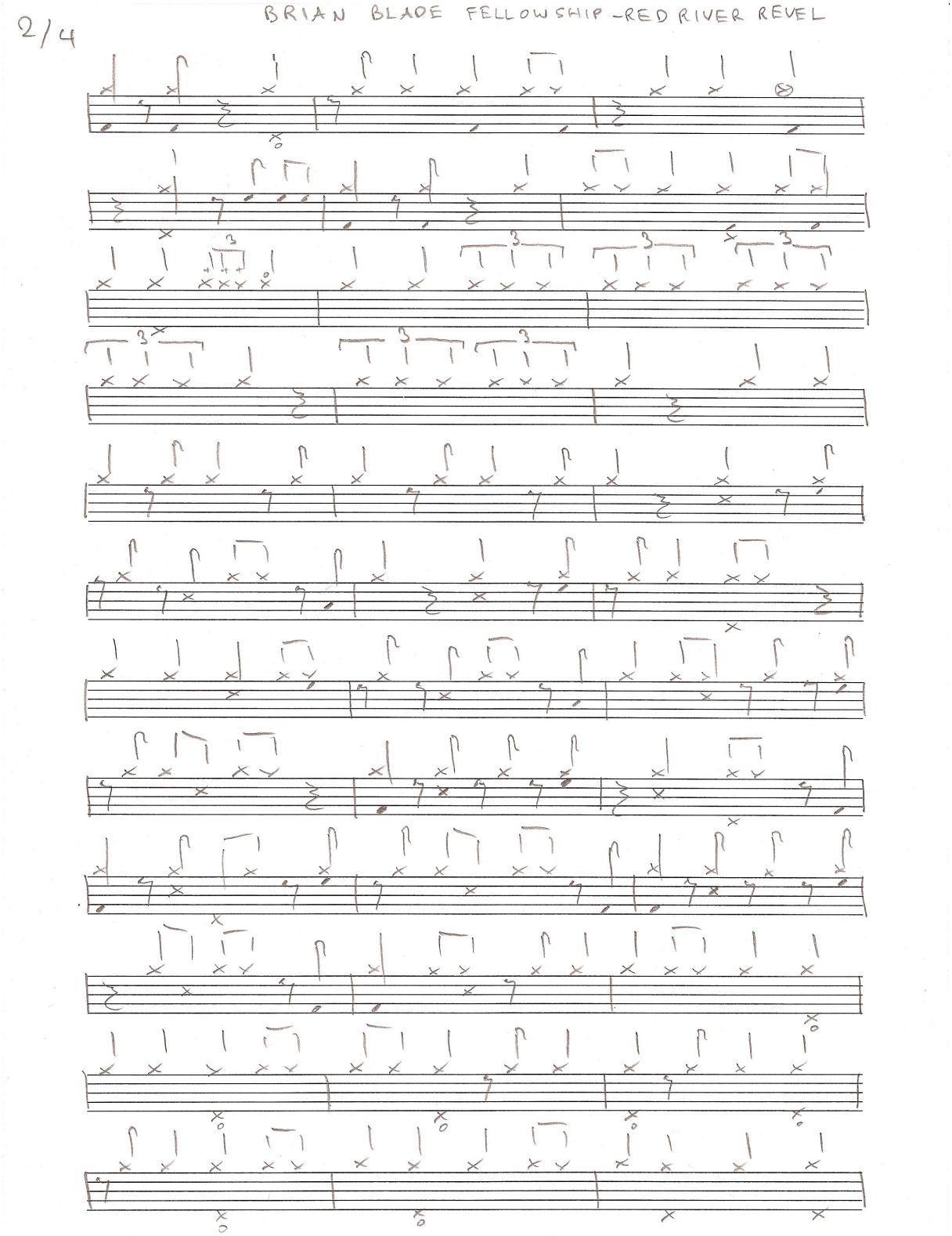
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BRIAN BLADE FELLOWSHIP – RED RIVER REVEL

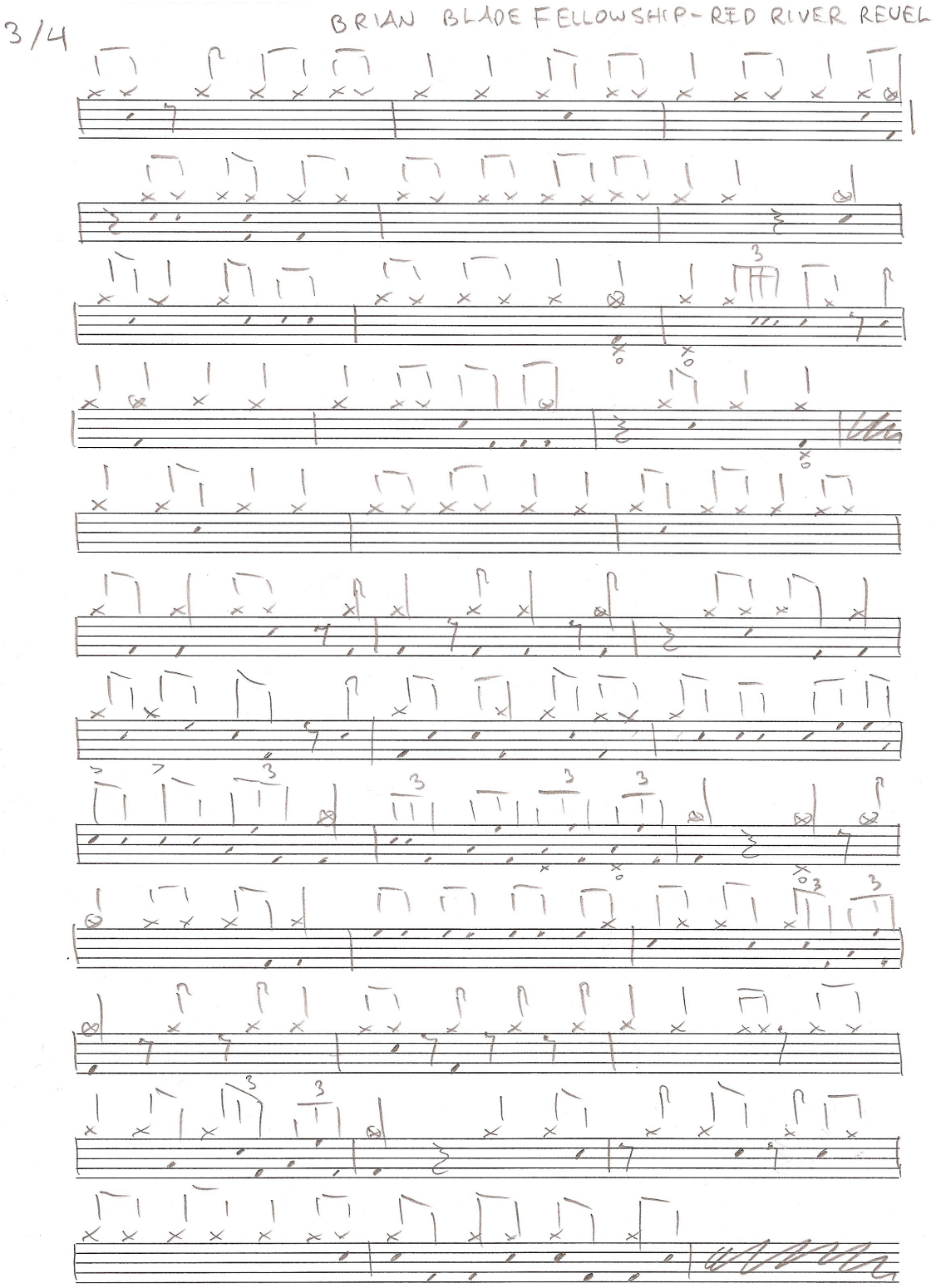
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BRIAN BLADE FELLOWSHIP - RED RIVER REVEL

4/4



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Keith Jarrett Trio – Standards Vol. 1
Chick Corea – Now he sings, now he sobs
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Brian Blade – Brian Blade Fellowship
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Branford Marsalis Trio – Trio Jeepy
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