# Freedom From Happiness

### A Musical Exploration of Divination

Scientists and athletes are doing the same thing. And they're not the only ones. They are but shining examples of the perfection we seek: that happiness that's always just slightly out of reach. We try not to make mistakes and we idolize those who are extraordinarily skillful. In music too we admire those who play "well".

As a mystic I wanted to find a way to create a piece that might be performed by wonderfully capable piano players, the best I could find, but where the piece would, by its design, make it impossible for the great skill achieved by the performer to have any effect whatsoever on the performance. Yet I wanted the piece to feature the beauty of that particular pianist's playing; I wanted it to feature the luck of the individual performer, while relegating skill to the background.

Contrary to what one tends to assume, noise, randomness or chance and luck are not the same thing. In fact they are almost unrelated: randomness and determinism are opposites, for example, but luck has no problem infiltrating even the most strictly deterministic process. Indeed that's why science has such a hard time even admitting the fact of luck: it frustrates all attempts to separate oneself from it. The fact that one can objectify noise, randomness or chance though is what enables that to be used as a kind of screen on which to view luck. This is often exploited in divination, and in **Freedom From Happiness** as well.

### How it Works

The idea is to divide the keys of a piano into groups, then to use a simple algorithm to generate one sequence of chords each of which contains a random selection of notes, but always half of the notes in that group, meanwhile generating a second sequence of chords where each chord is made up of the notes from that group that are not present in the corresponding chord in the first sequence. This is simpler than it might sound. For example if we choose a group of notes like say C, D, E, F, G, A, B and another C and then we run this algorithm it might happen that for the first pair of chords it outputs, one chord might consist of the notes C, D, F, and B, in which case the other chord would necessarily consist of the notes E, G, A and the other C. Simple. For the next pair of chords the notes in each chord would probably be different (because they are chosen randomly) but they'll always compliment such that all of the notes in that particular group are represented. In other words the score is seemingly pointless, because no matter how the notes are allocated the effect when the two chords are played at the same time is that exactly all of the notes in that group are played; the only thing that changes from chord pair to chord pair is which notes from a given group happen to be in which chord.

If we divide the entire piano keyboard into groups like that such that every note of the keyboard is included once in a group, and if (at least hypothetically) there could be several piano players performing together this piece on a single piano, then the effect would be that they would, for each combination of all of the corresponding chords, be playing exactly all of the notes on the piano. If we were to sequence these chords in a score and ask the performers to play one chord every six seconds then every six seconds all of the notes of the piano are going to be played, and the only thing that's going to change is which performer happens to be playing exactly which notes in a given measure.

The above short description conveys the basic idea in this piece. Add to that the fact that the groups of notes--their position on the keyboard and the number of notes they contain--are chosen such that the chords are "easy to play," even for a not-very-skilled performer; for a skilled pianist to play the piece is almost trivially simple (that's by intention: this piece is not about trying to induce "mistakes" by inventing a difficult task).

If the piece were to be performed by a machine (or a "perfect" human) then every six seconds exactly all of the notes on the piano would be played in exactly the same way, without any variation. The celebration of luck is introduced by the following trick: as it happens, the invention of the piano's "action" necessitated the sacrifice of parts of the dynamic range of the instrument. Over much of the range from soft to loud the volume of a given note is easy to control, but at very low volume it is virtually impossible to control, no matter how skilled a performer might be. I can imagine that over the centuries mechanical geniuses have managed to extend the "usable" dynamic range of the piano. This is fortunate, because a side effect is that at extremely low volume achieving control of the action is basically impossible. The best piano players I've ever met (and I think I've met some amazing piano players) have confirmed that this is so; it's never necessary to force anything to achieve this unpredictability. So, the last two details in this explanation are: one, that the piece is to be played at a volume that's low enough that only a small percentage of the notes that are "played" even produce any sound; the other is that the performers should not use any sort of mechanical time keeping device to measure "six seconds" (a human feels "six seconds" very differently from how a machine measures that, and, whether the piece is performed by multiple humans or by a single pianist in a multi-track recording, the tendency is for time to be pretty flexible).

**Special Instructions to the Performers**

1. Please play the piece *extremely* softly, so softly that only a small percentage of the notes played even produce a sound. Exactly what percentage of the notes should sound is not fixed though; perhaps 1 to 2 percent, perhaps more, perhaps less.

2. Please don't use any sort of mechanical time keeping device, and please do not refer to other performers or try to coordinate where you are in the piece with where you think they might be.

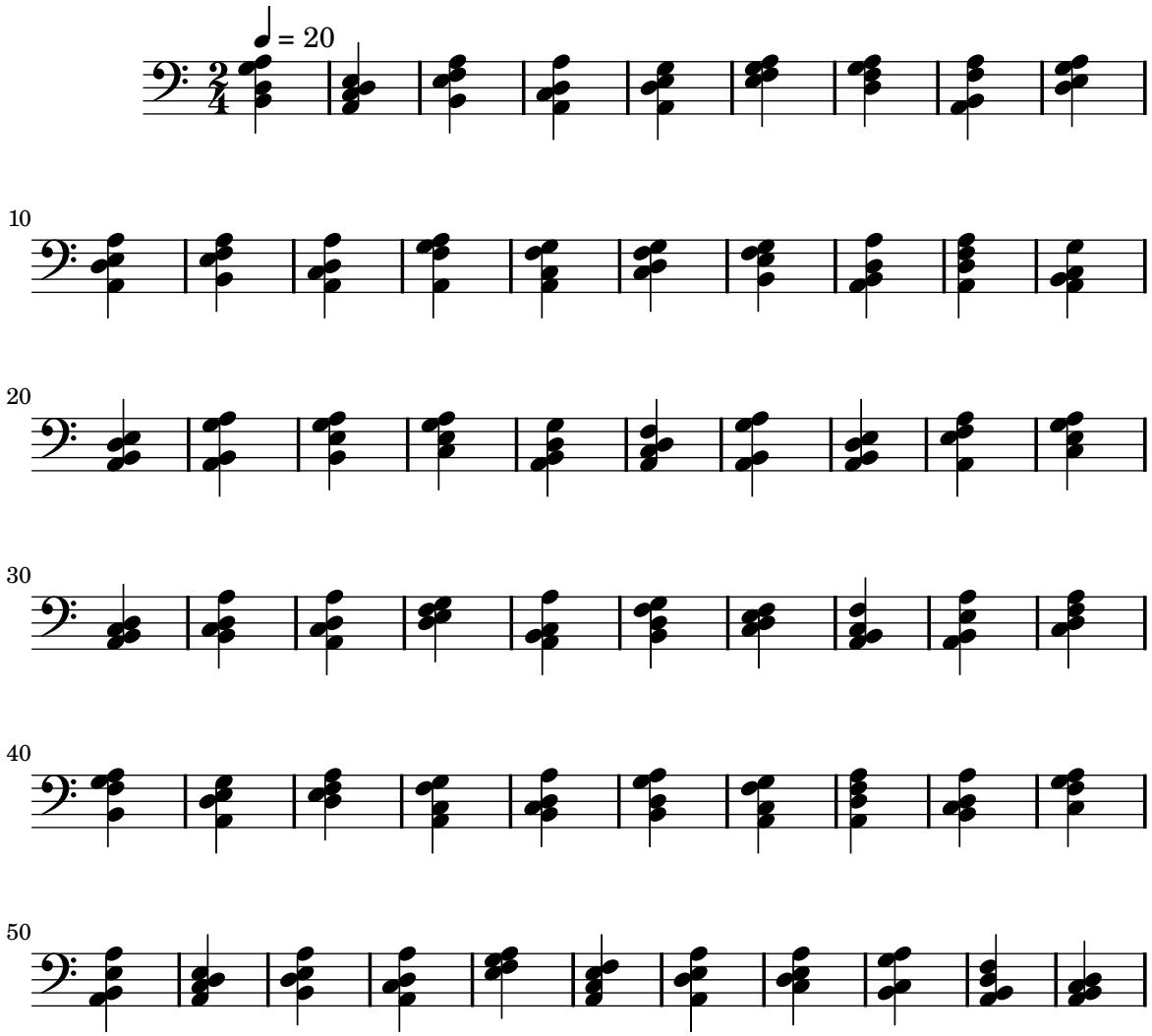
Freedom From Happiness (c) 2003, 2007, 2010, 2012 by Sam Ashley

# Freedom From Happiness

## C 21-33 +2  Part I

Transposed +2 octaves; play this part 2 octaves below where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 21 23 24 26 28 29 31 33 (where note 60 = middle C).

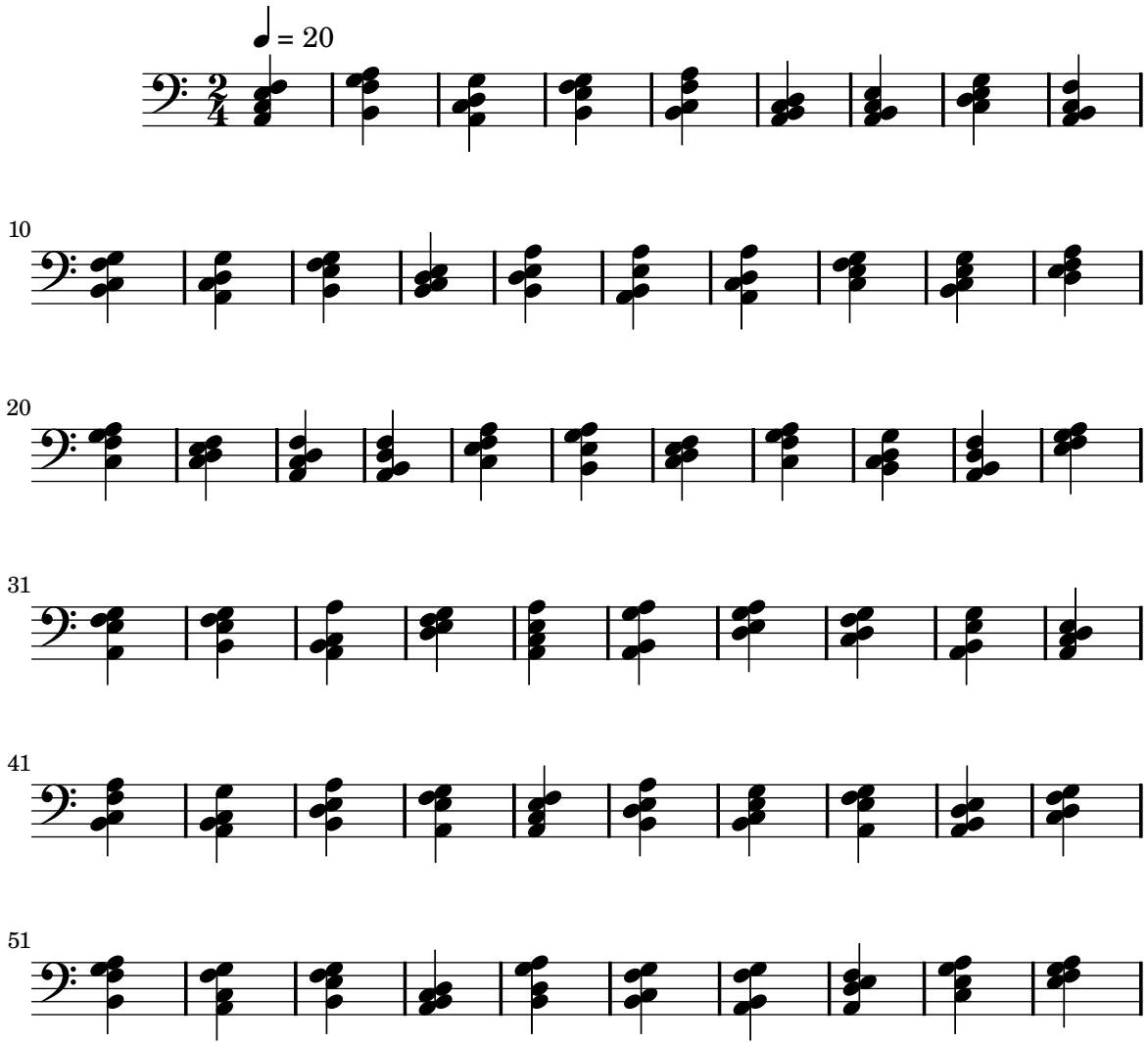


# Freedom From Happiness

## C 21-33 +2  Part II

Transposed +2 octaves; play this part 2 octaves below where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 21 23 24 26 28 29 31 33 (where note 60 = middle C).

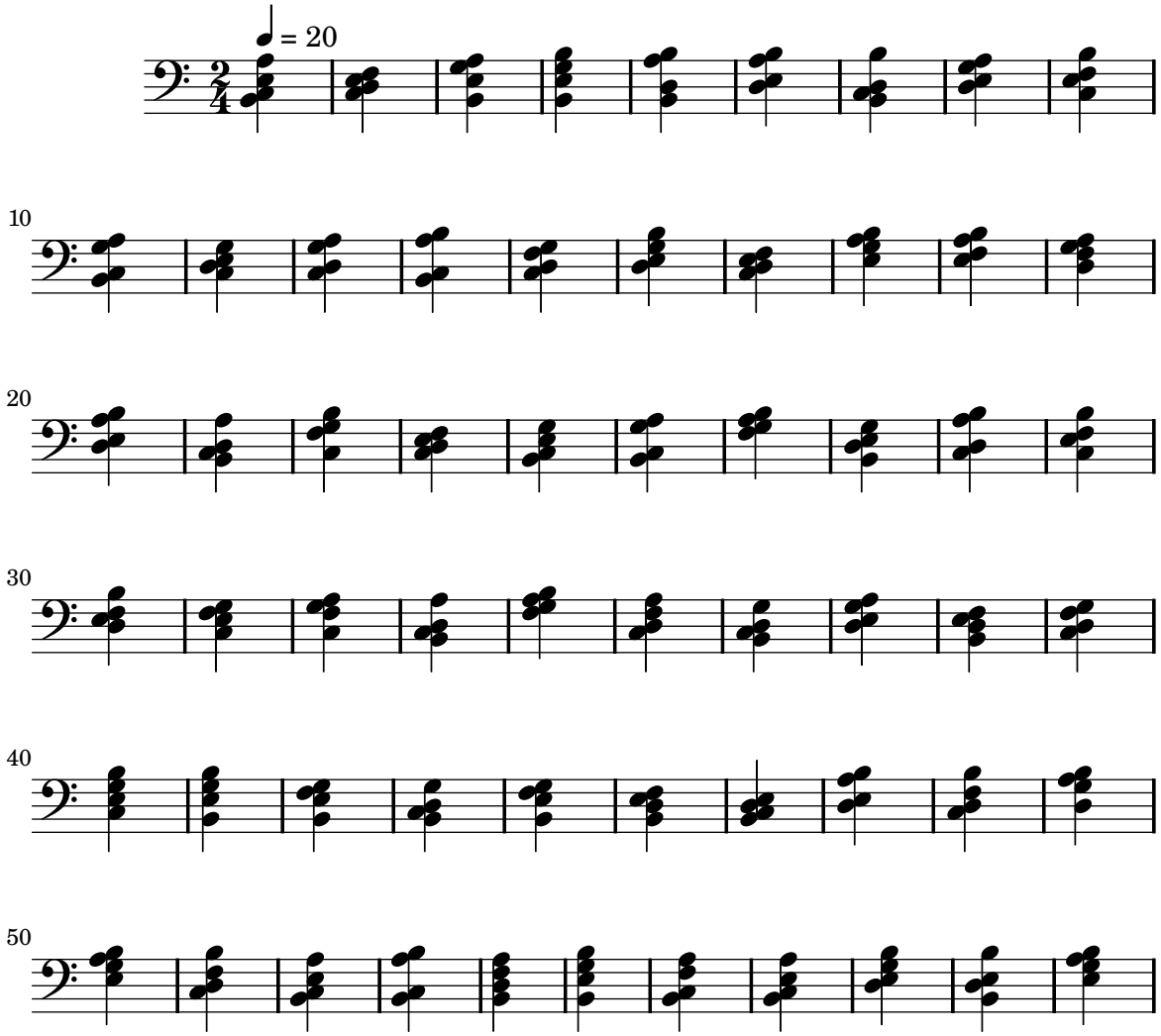


# Freedom From Happiness

## C 35-47 +1  Part I

Transposed +1 octave; play this part 1 octave below where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 35 36 38 40 41 43 45 47 (where note 60 = middle C).

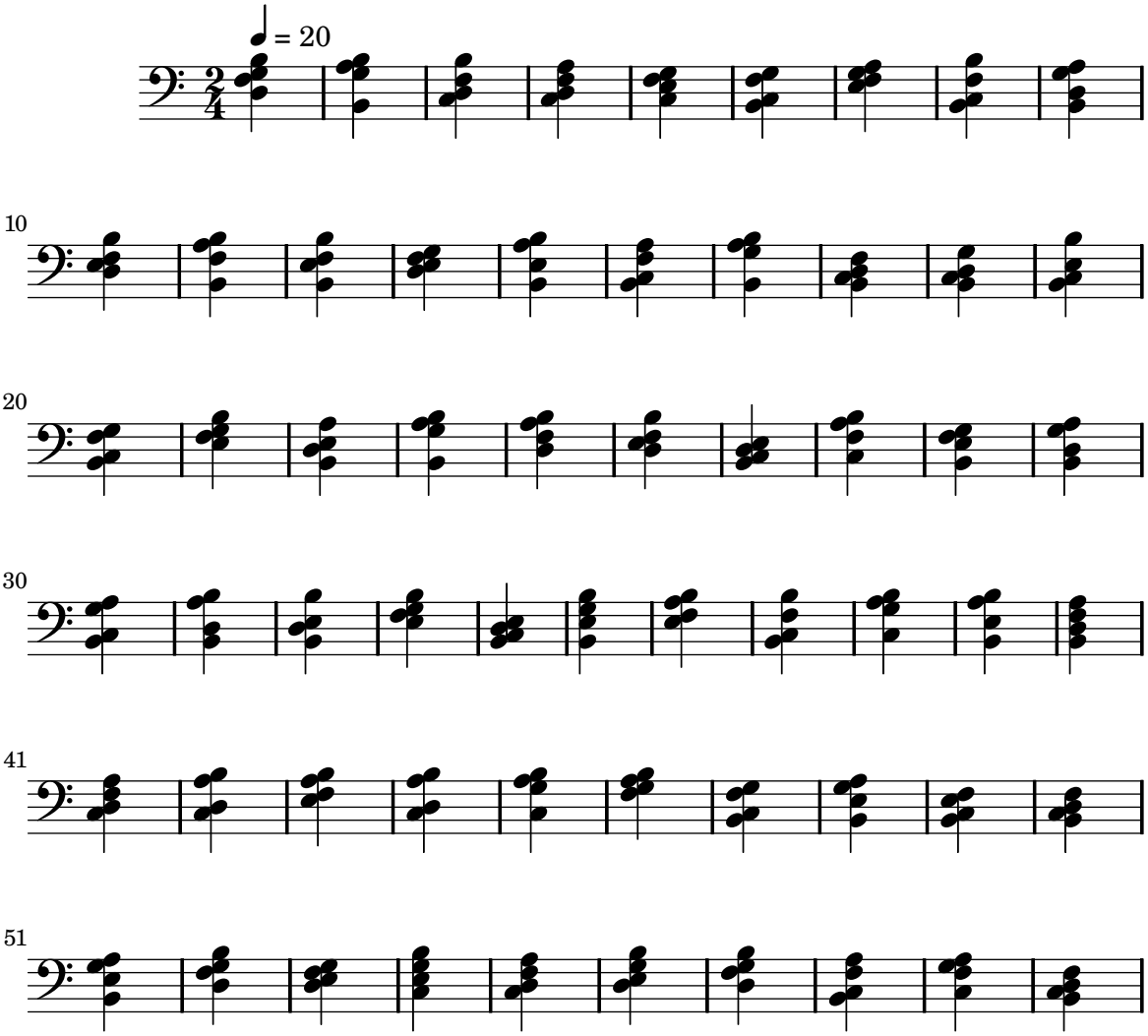


# Freedom From Happiness

## C 35-47 +1  Part II

Transposed +1 octave; play this part 1 octave below where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 35 36 38 40 41 43 45 47 (where note 60 = middle C).

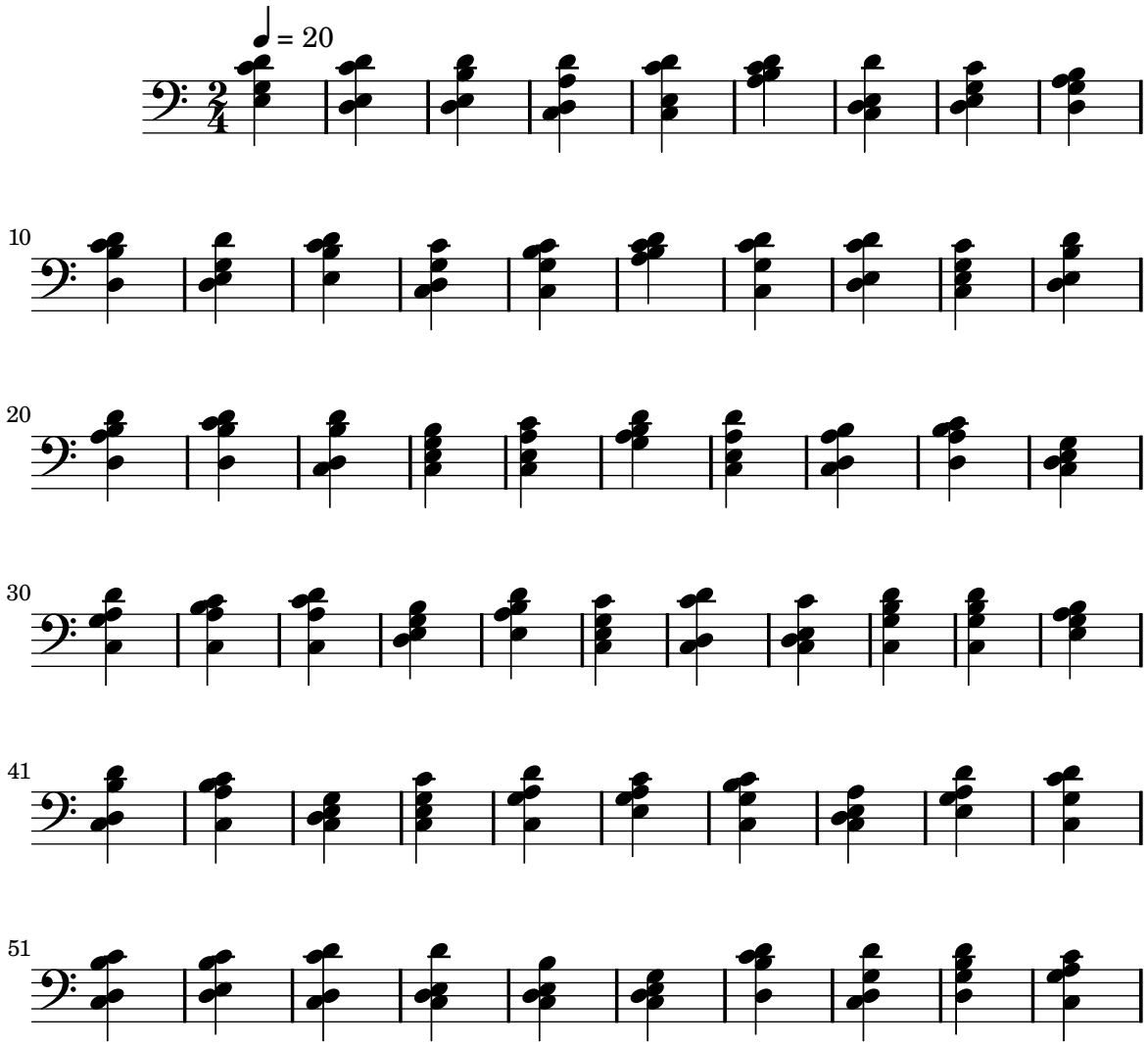


# Freedom From Happiness

C 48-62 +0  Part I

Not transposed; play this part where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 48 50 52 55 57 59 60 62 (where note 60 = middle C).

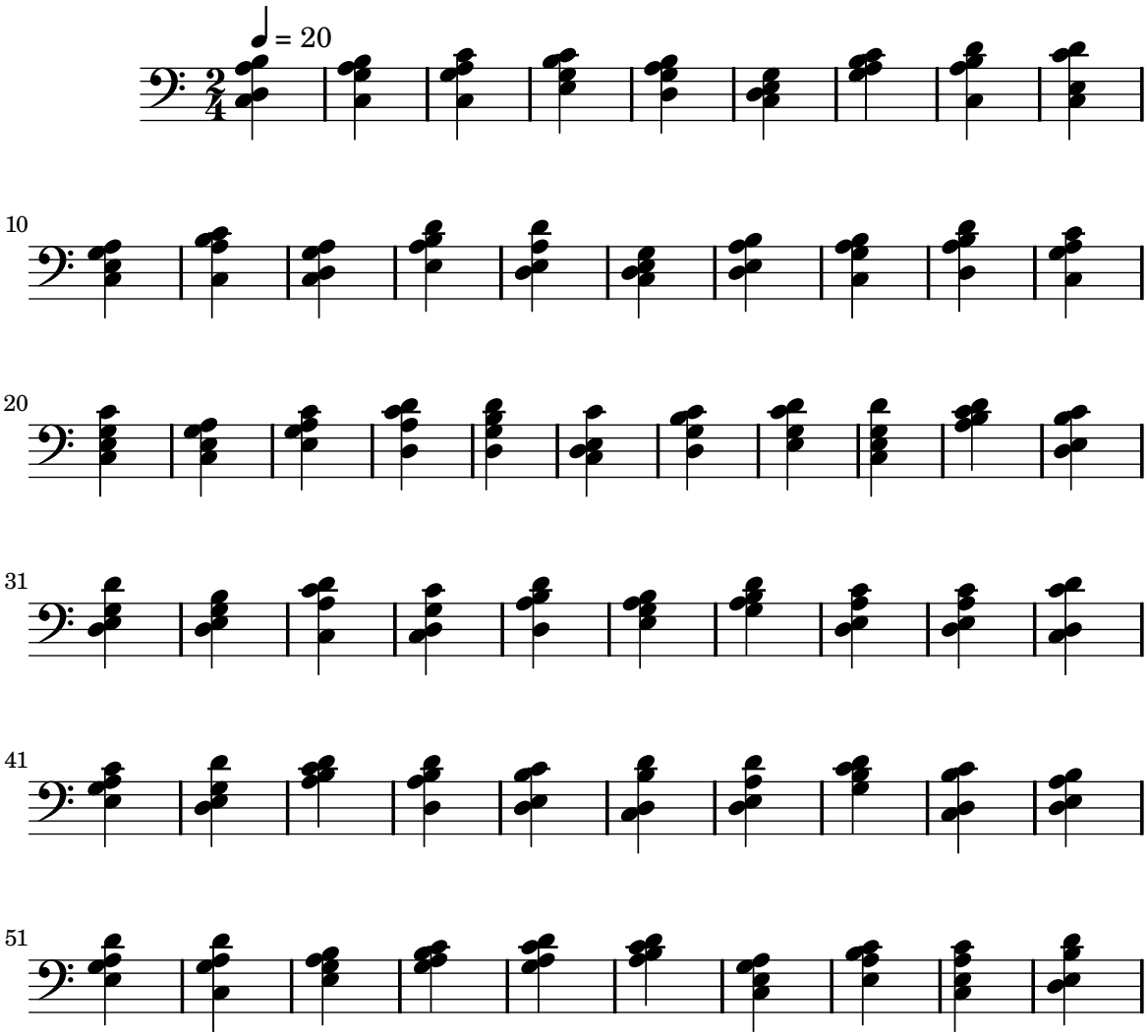


# Freedom From Happiness

C 48-62 +0  Part II

Not transposed; play this part where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 48 50 52 55 57 59 60 62 (where note 60 = middle C).

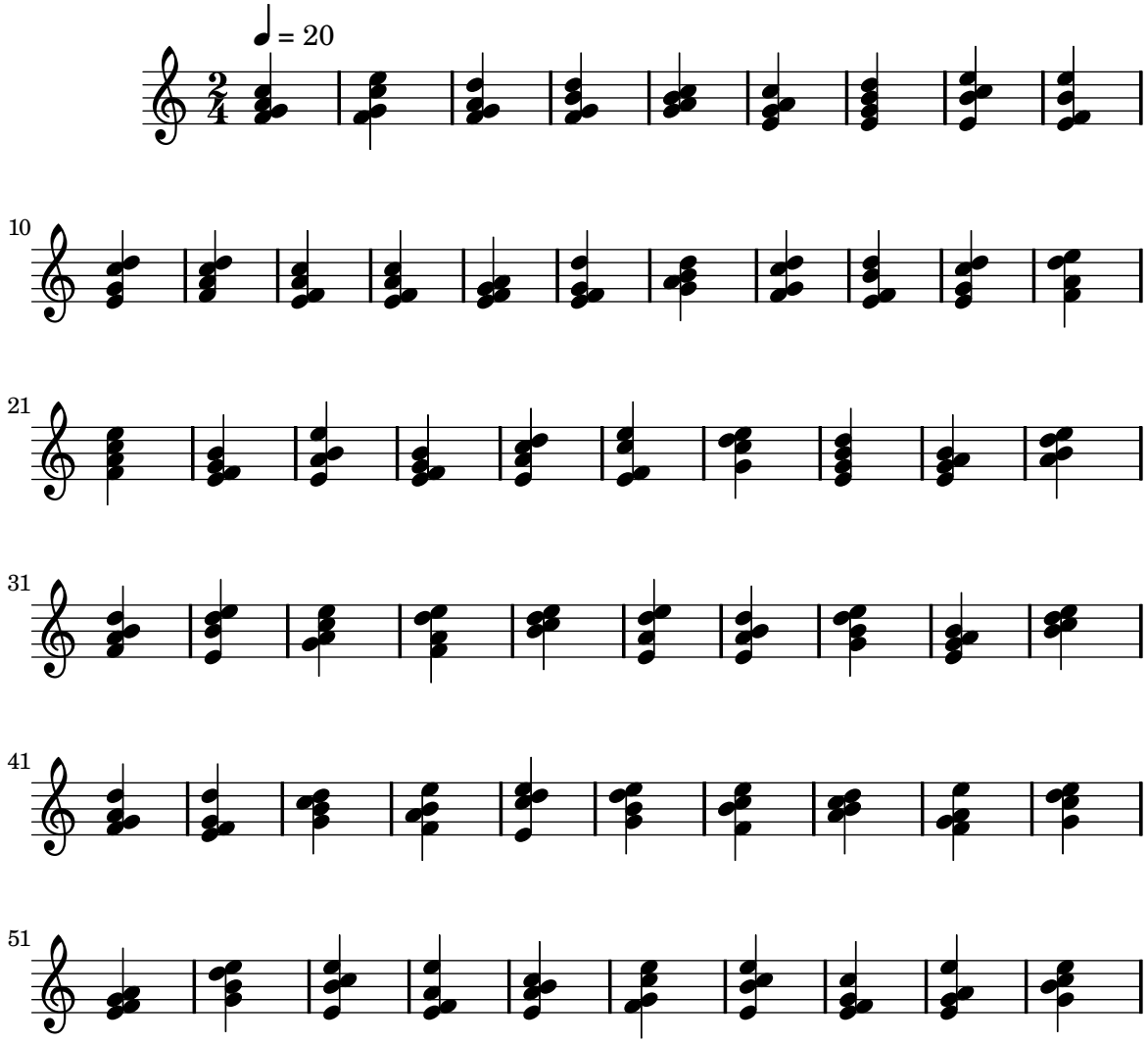


# Freedom From Happiness

C 64-76 +0  Part I

Not transposed; play this part where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 64 65 67 69 71 72 74 76 (where note 60 = middle C).

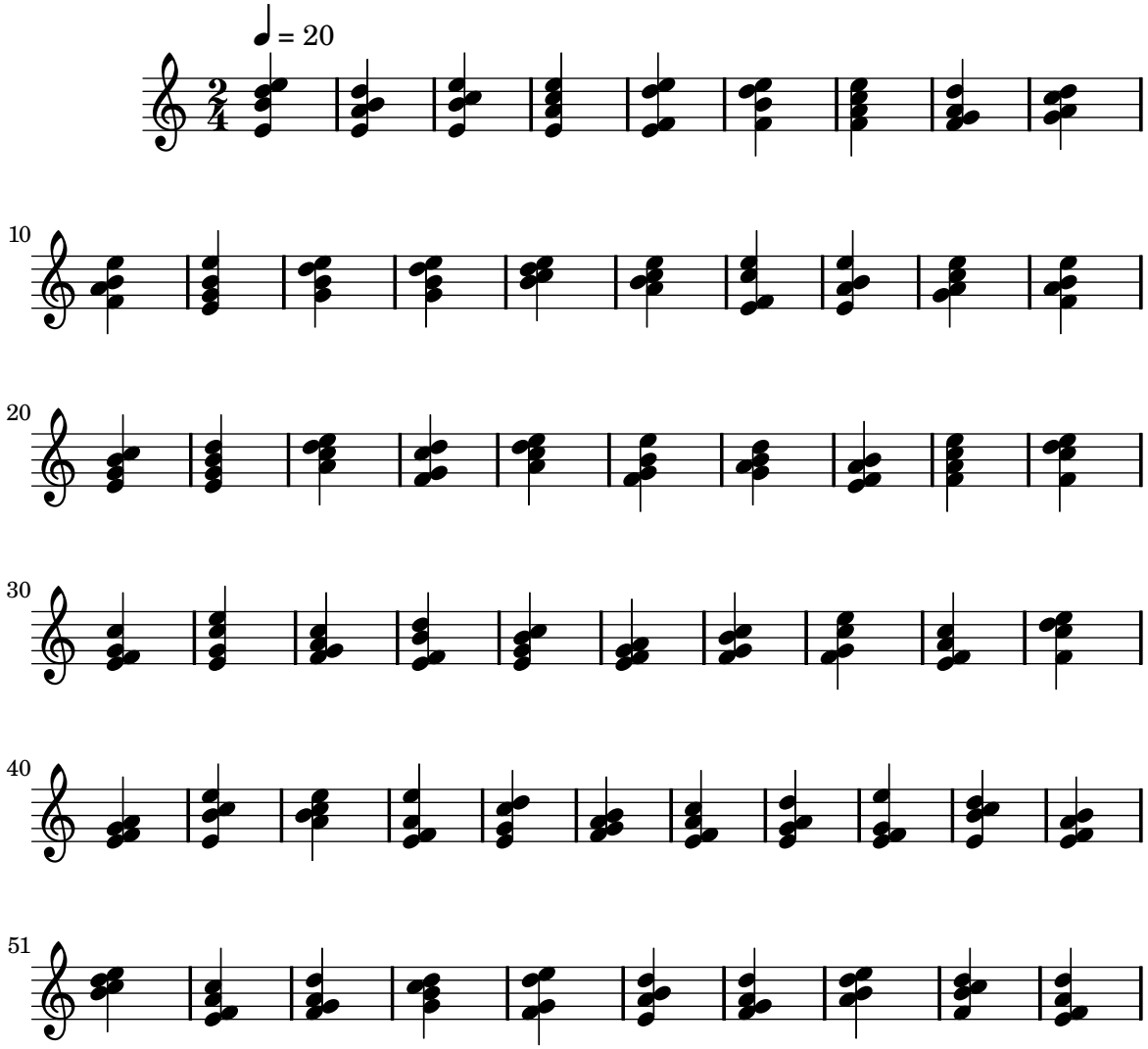


# Freedom From Happiness

C 64-76 +0  Part II

Not transposed; play this part where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 64 65 67 69 71 72 74 76 (where note 60 = middle C).

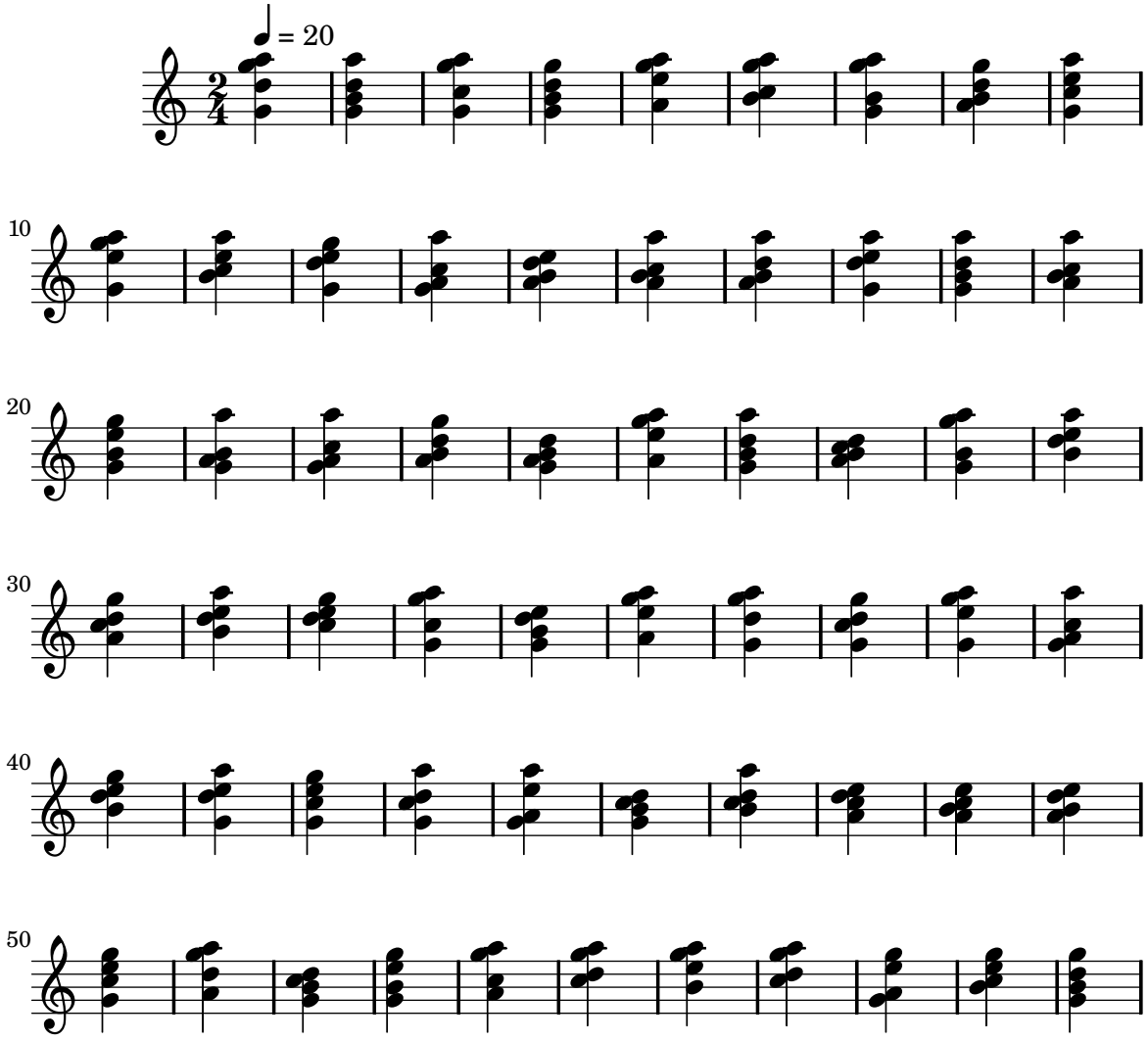


# Freedom From Happiness

C 79-93 -1  Part I

Transposed -1 octave; play this part 1 octave above where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 79 81 83 84 86 88 91 93 (where note 60 = middle C).

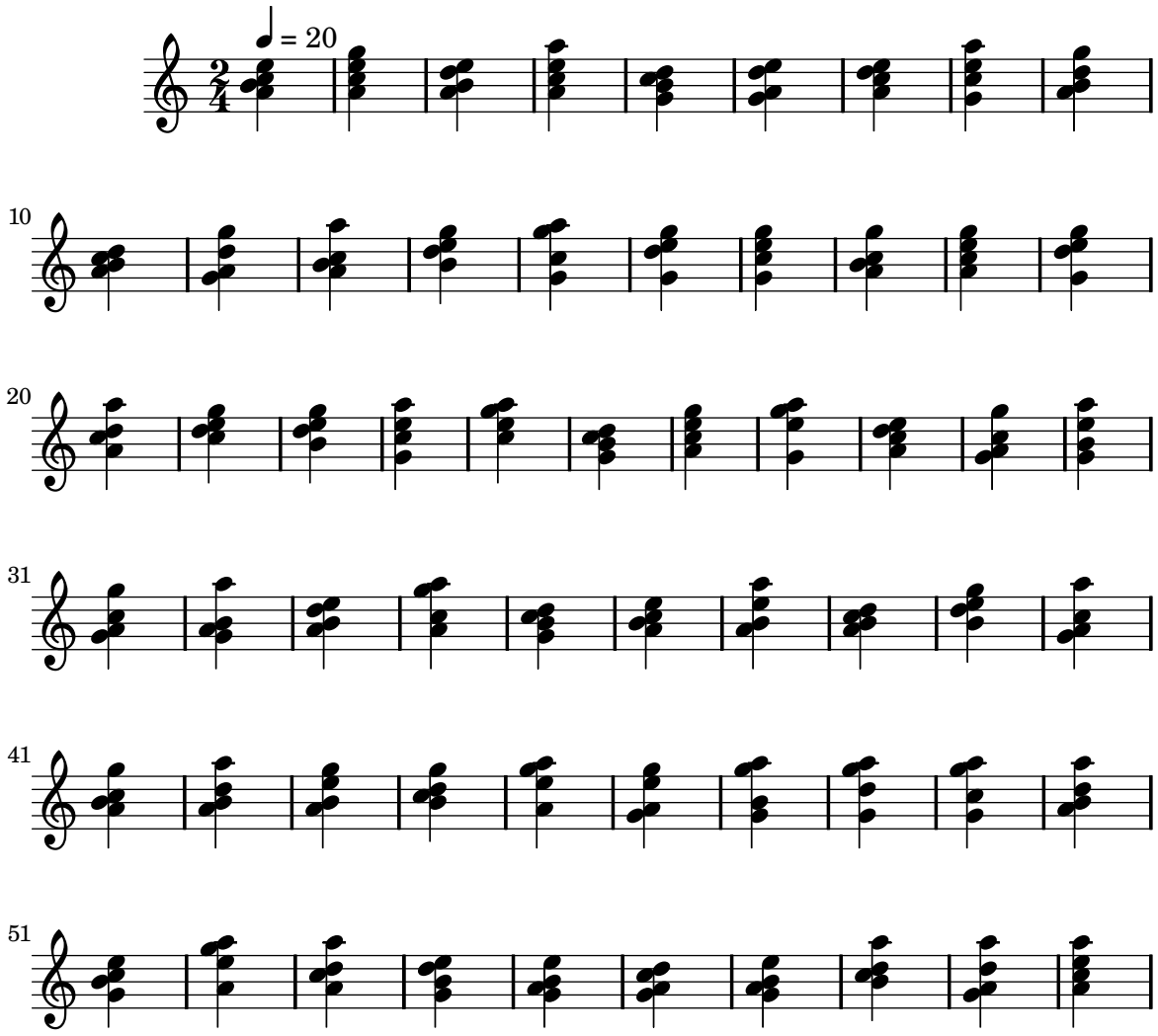


# Freedom From Happiness

C 79-93 -1  Part II

Transposed -1 octave; play this part 1 octave above where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 79 81 83 84 86 88 91 93 (where note 60 = middle C).

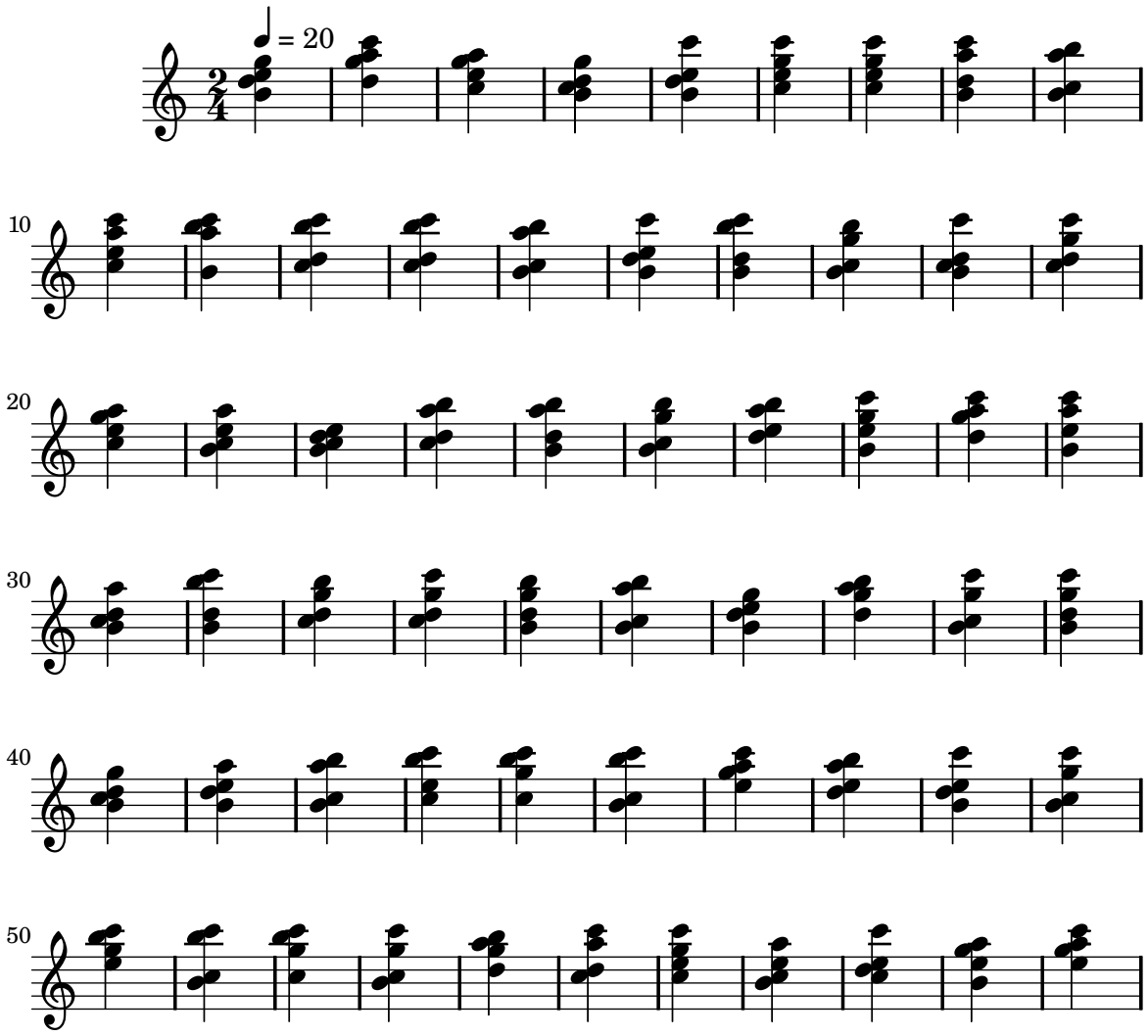


# Freedom From Happiness

## C 95-108 -2  Part I

Transposed -2 octaves; play this part 2 octaves above where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 95 96 98 100 103 105 107 108 (where note 60 = middle C).

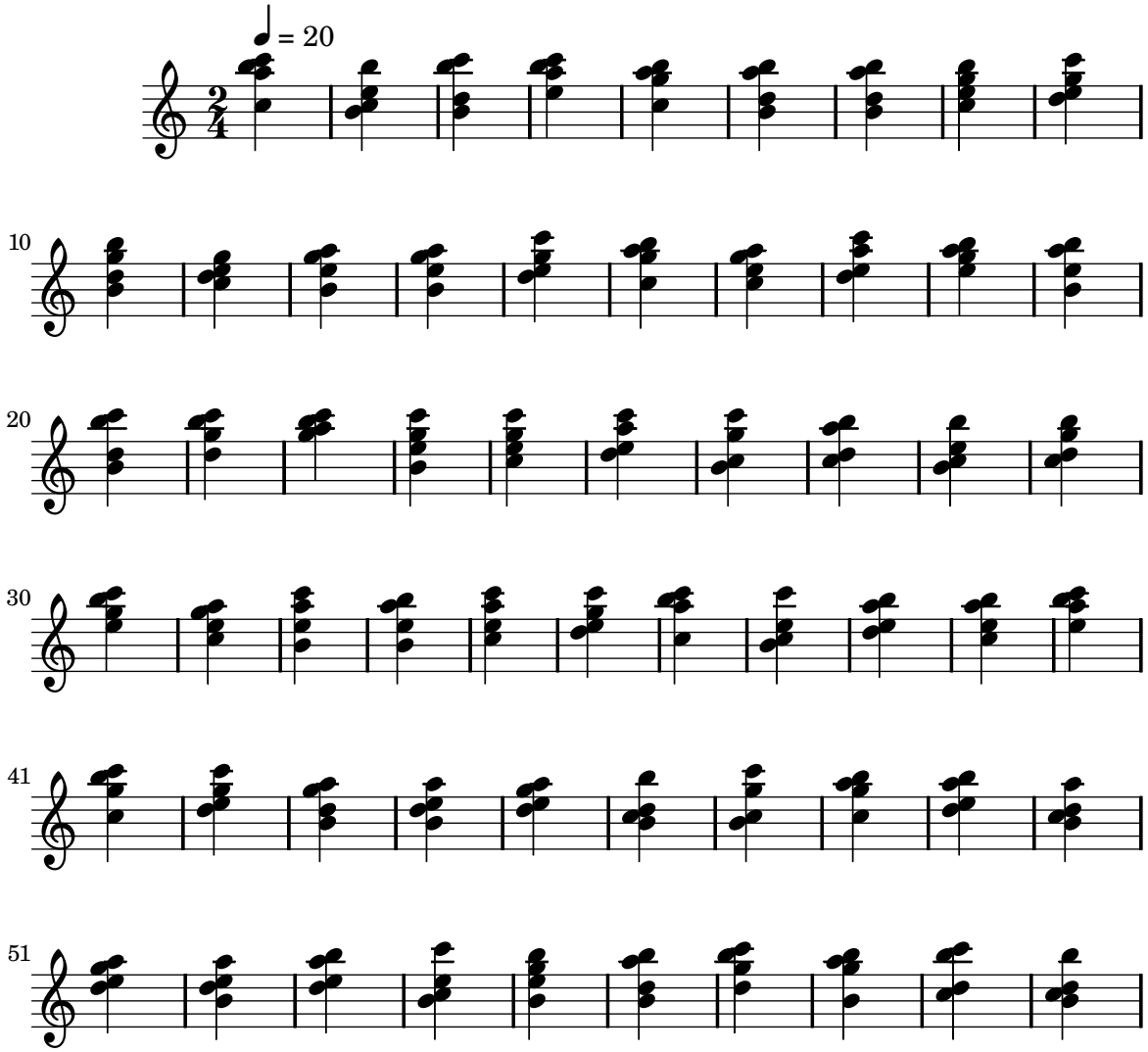


# Freedom From Happiness

C 95-108 -2  Part II

Transposed -2 octaves; play this part 2 octaves above where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 95 96 98 100 103 105 107 108 (where note 60 = middle C).

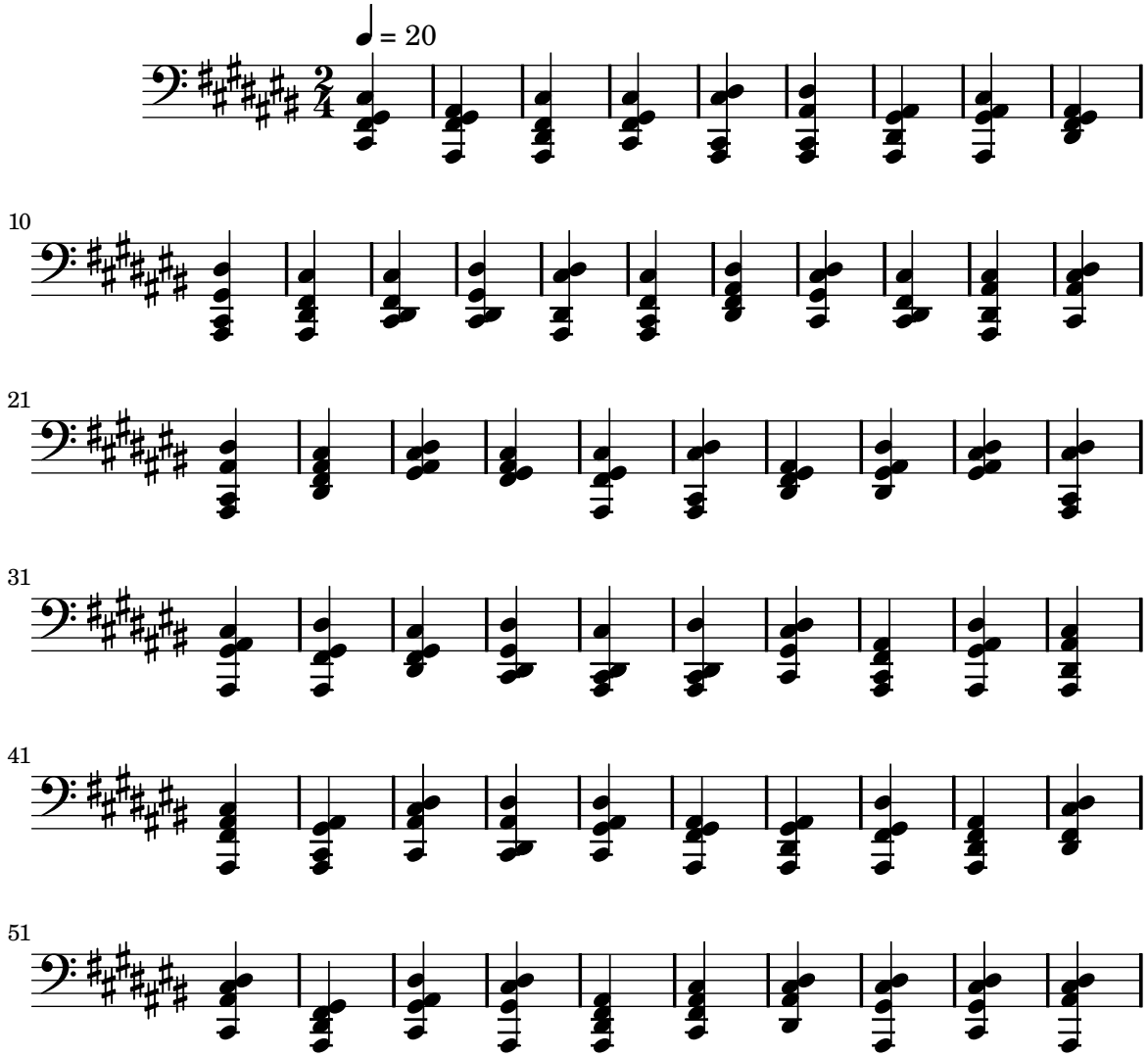


# Freedom From Happiness

## C# 22-39 +1  Part I

Transposed +1 octave; play this part 1 octave below where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 22 25 27 30 32 34 37 39 (where note 60 = middle C).

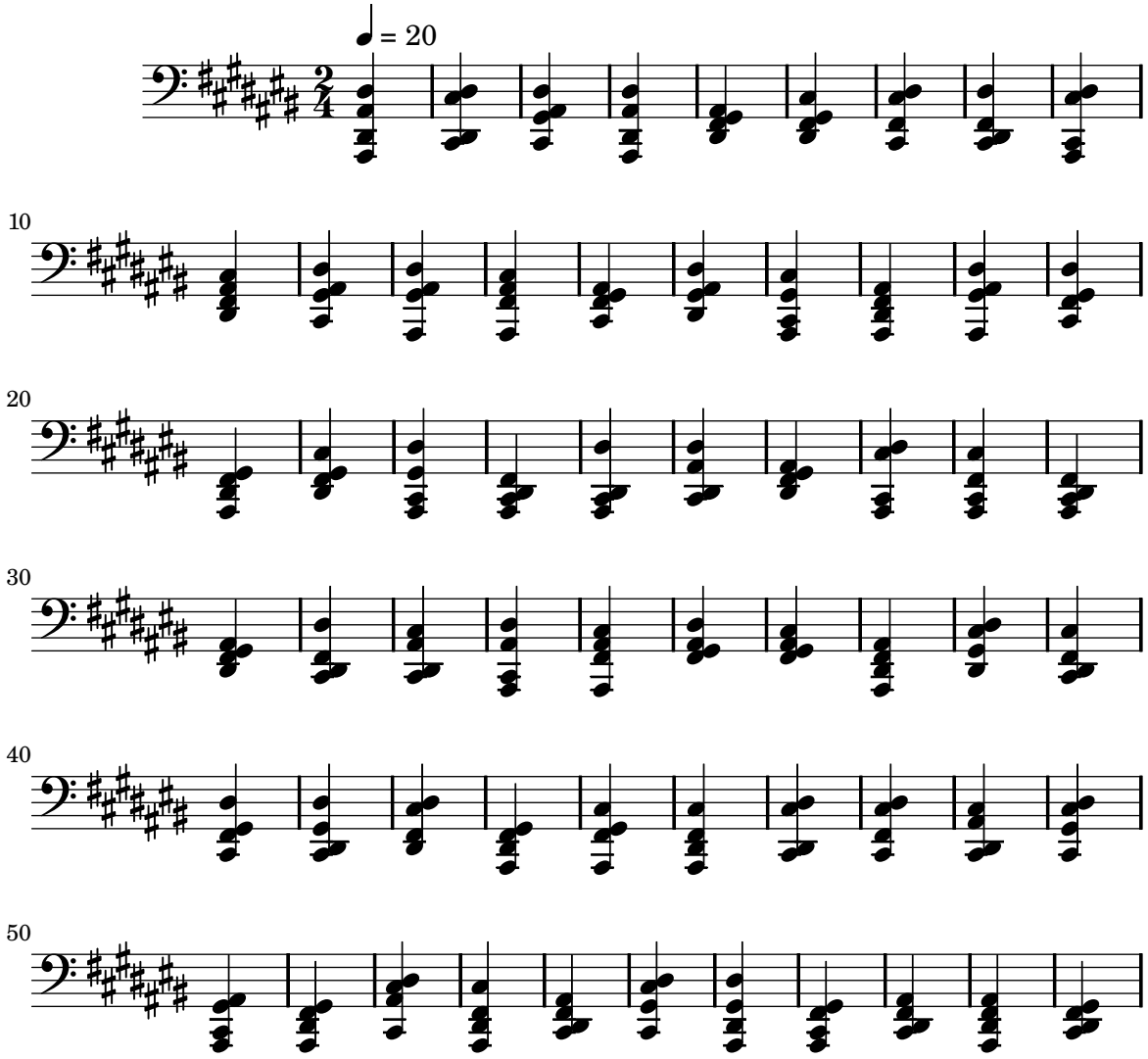


# Freedom From Happiness

## C# 22-39 +1  Part II

Transposed +1 octave; play this part 1 octave below where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 22 25 27 30 32 34 37 39 (where note 60 = middle C).

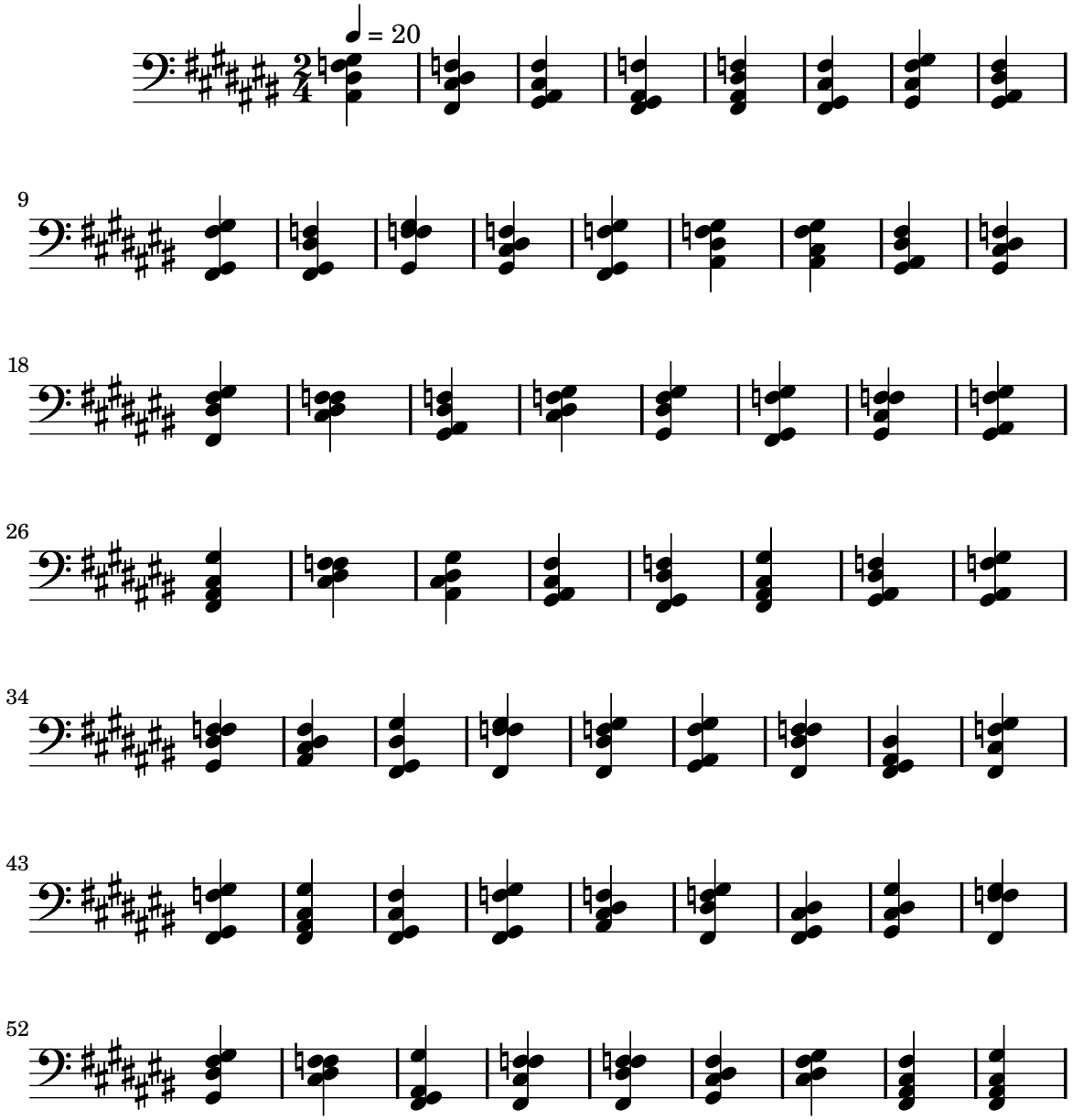


# Freedom From Happiness

## C# 42-56 +0  Part I

Not transposed; play this part where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 42 44 46 49 51 53 54 56 (where note 60 = middle C).

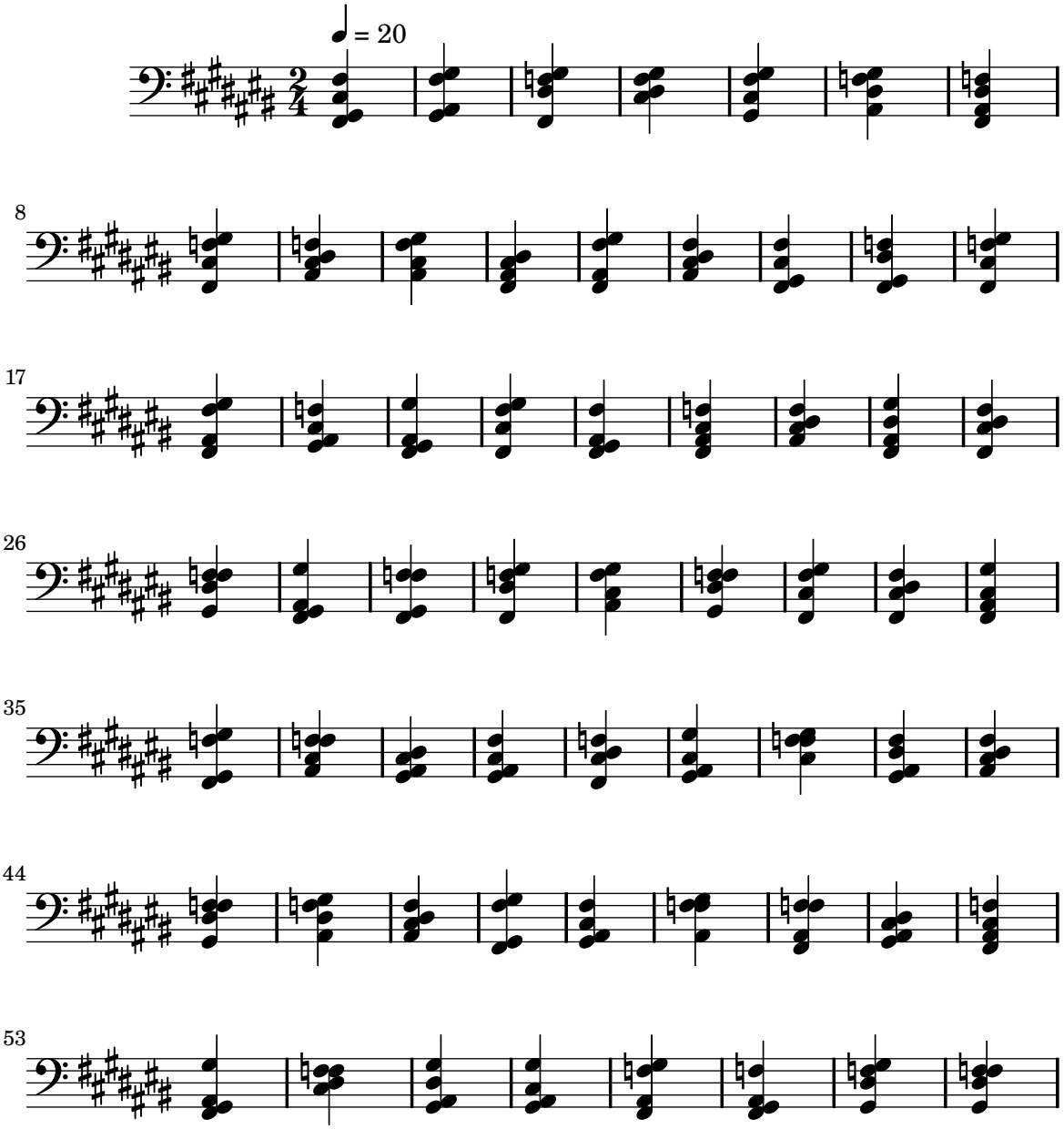


# Freedom From Happiness

C# 42-56 +0  Part II

Not transposed; play this part where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 42 44 46 49 51 53 54 56 (where note 60 = middle C).

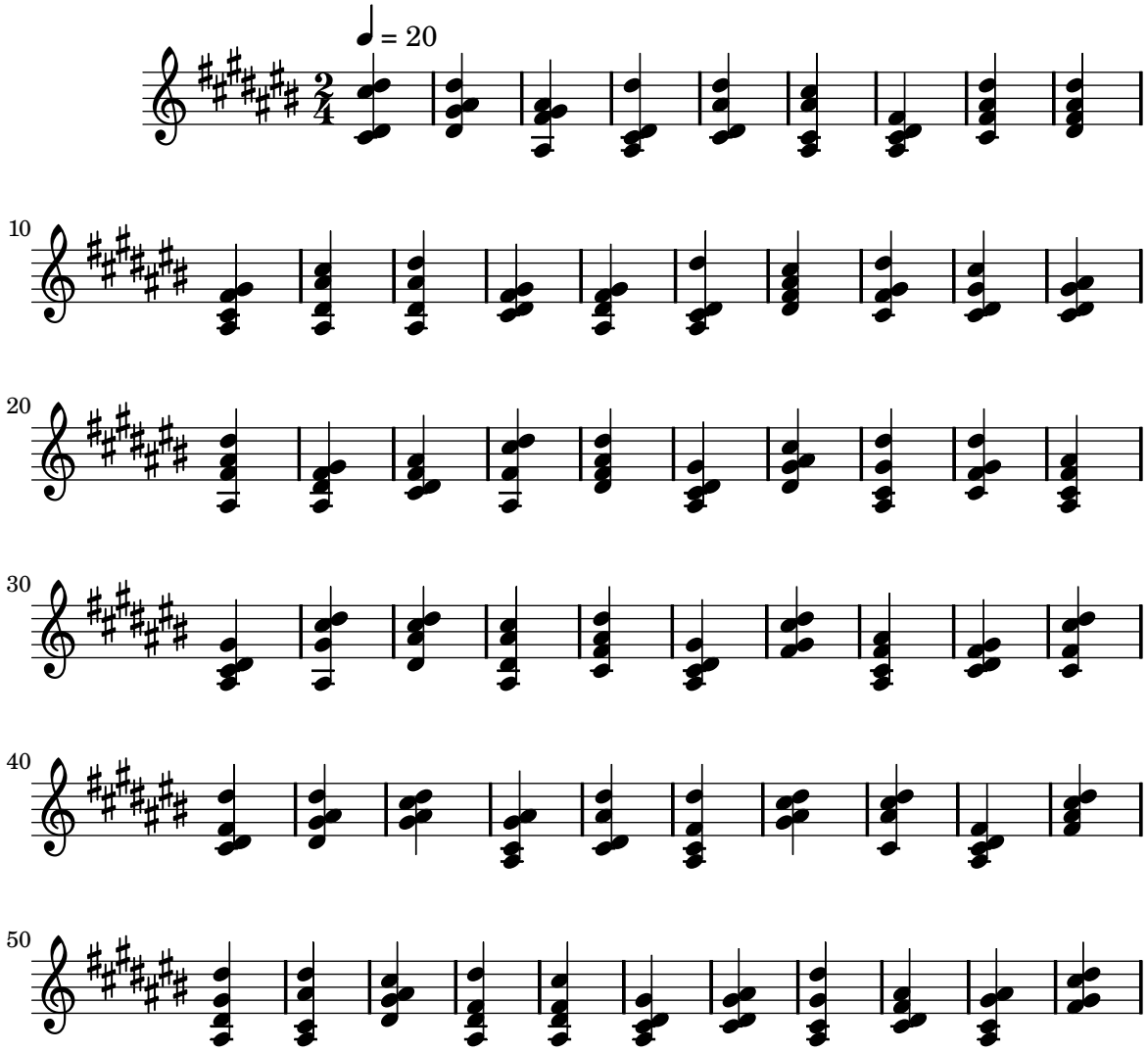


# Freedom From Happiness

### C# 58-75 +0  Part I

Not transposed; play this part where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 58 61 63 66 68 70 73 75 (where note 60 = middle C).

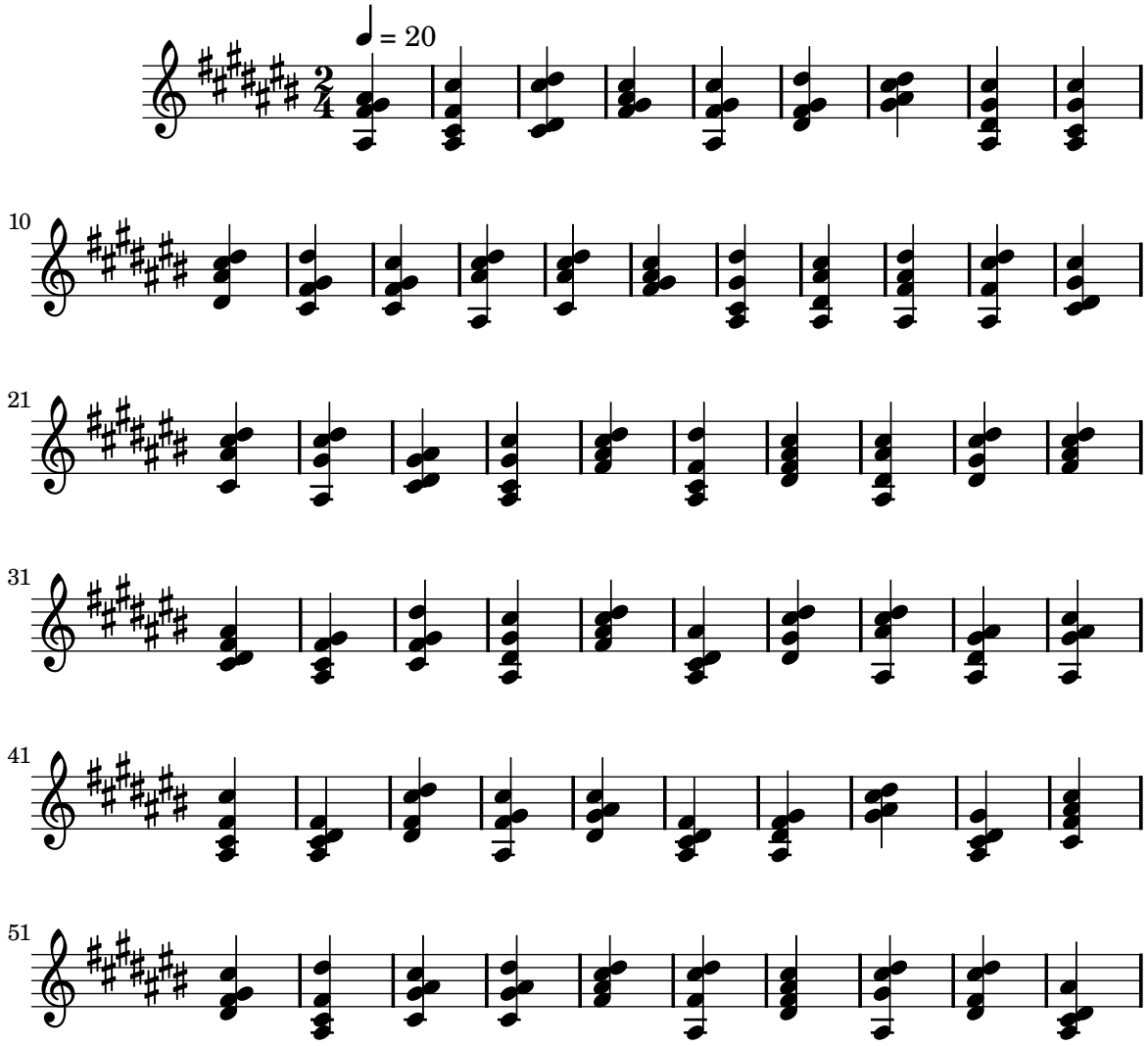


# Freedom From Happiness

### C# 58-75 +0  Part II

Not transposed; play this part where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 58 61 63 66 68 70 73 75 (where note 60 = middle C).

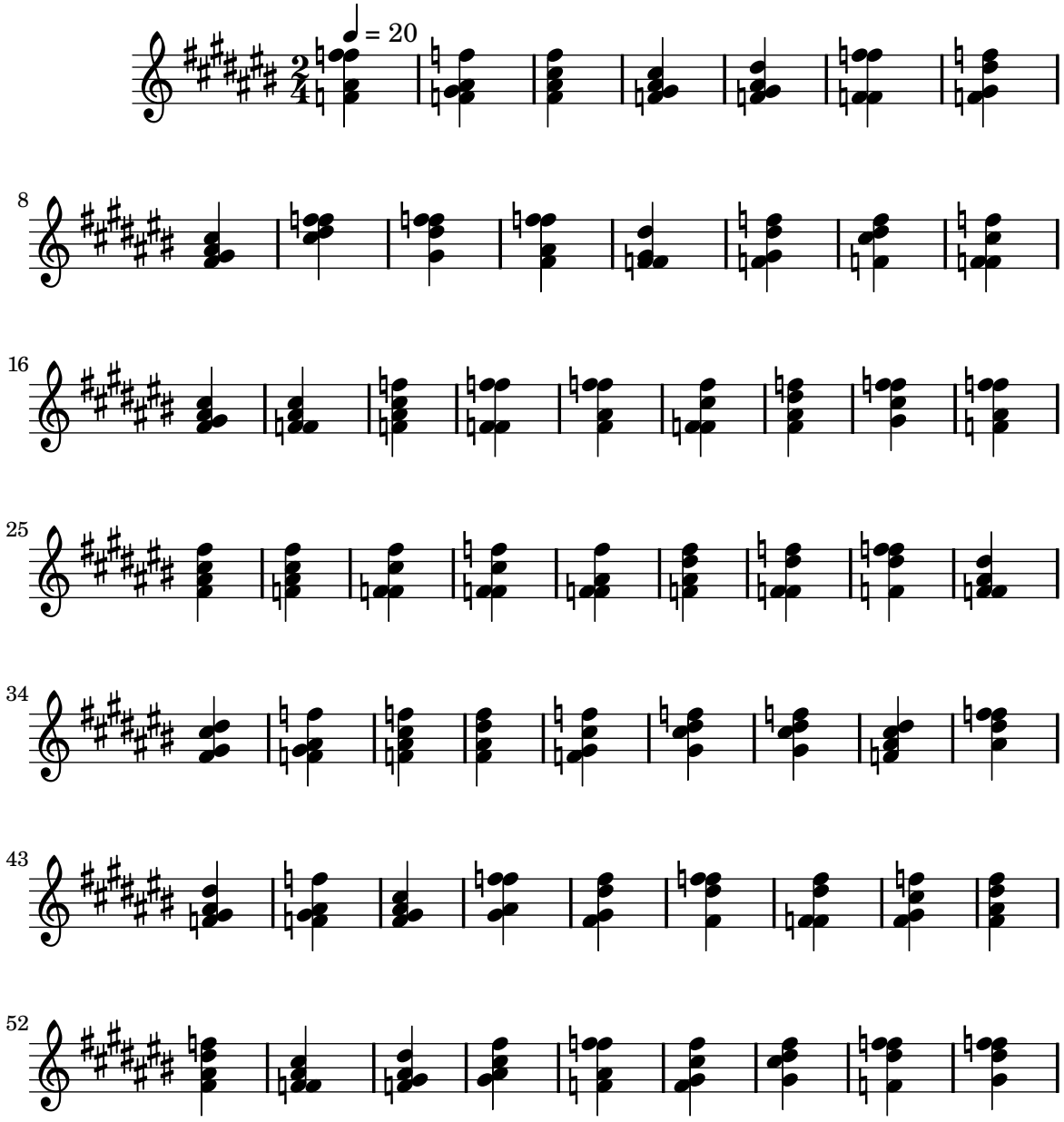


# Freedom From Happiness

### C# 77-90 -1  Part I

Transposed -1 octave; play this part 1 octave above where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 77 78 80 82 85 87 89 90 (where note 60 = middle C).

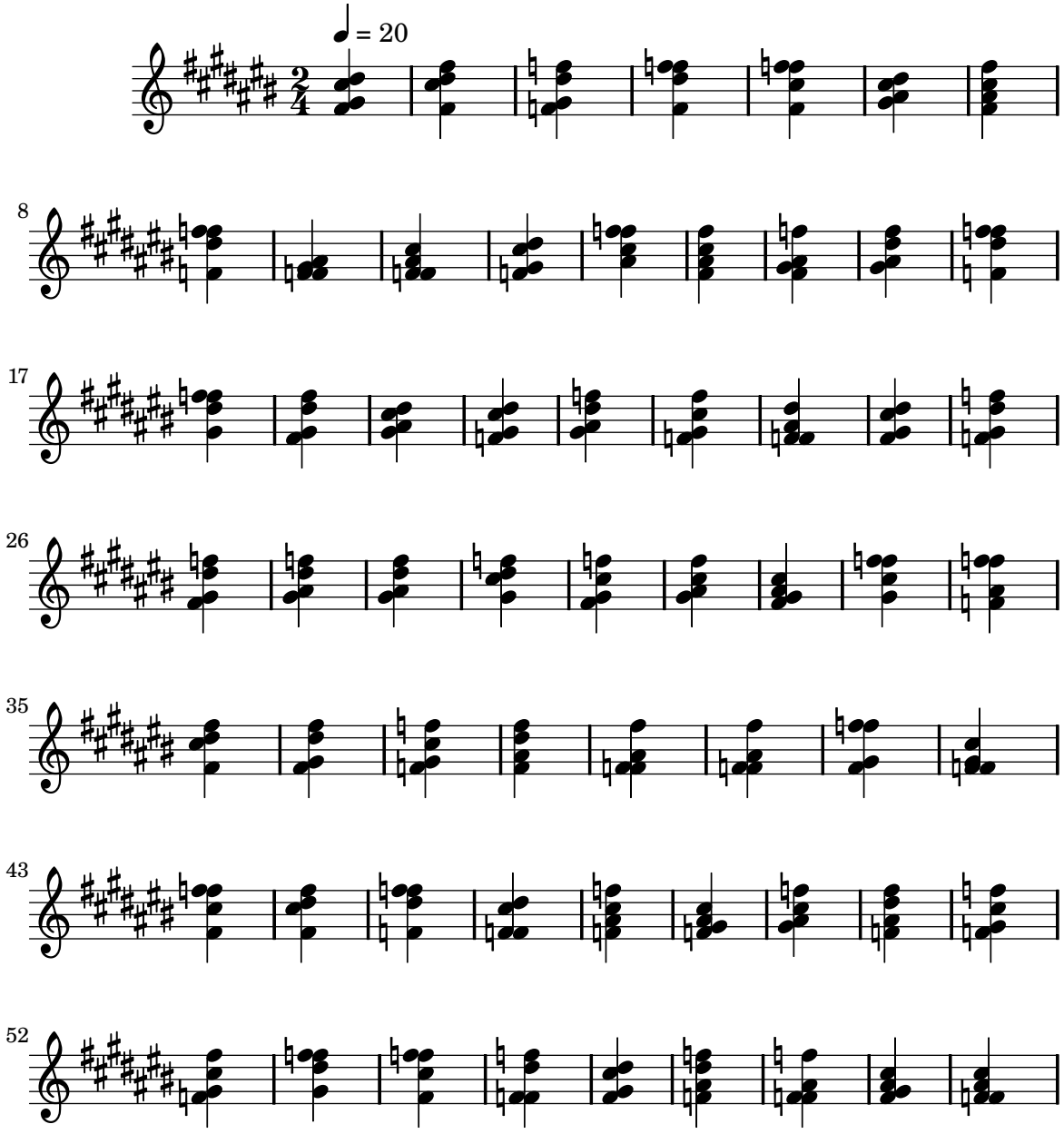


# Freedom From Happiness

### C# 77-90 -1  Part II

Transposed -1 octave; play this part 1 octave above where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 77 78 80 82 85 87 89 90 (where note 60 = middle C).

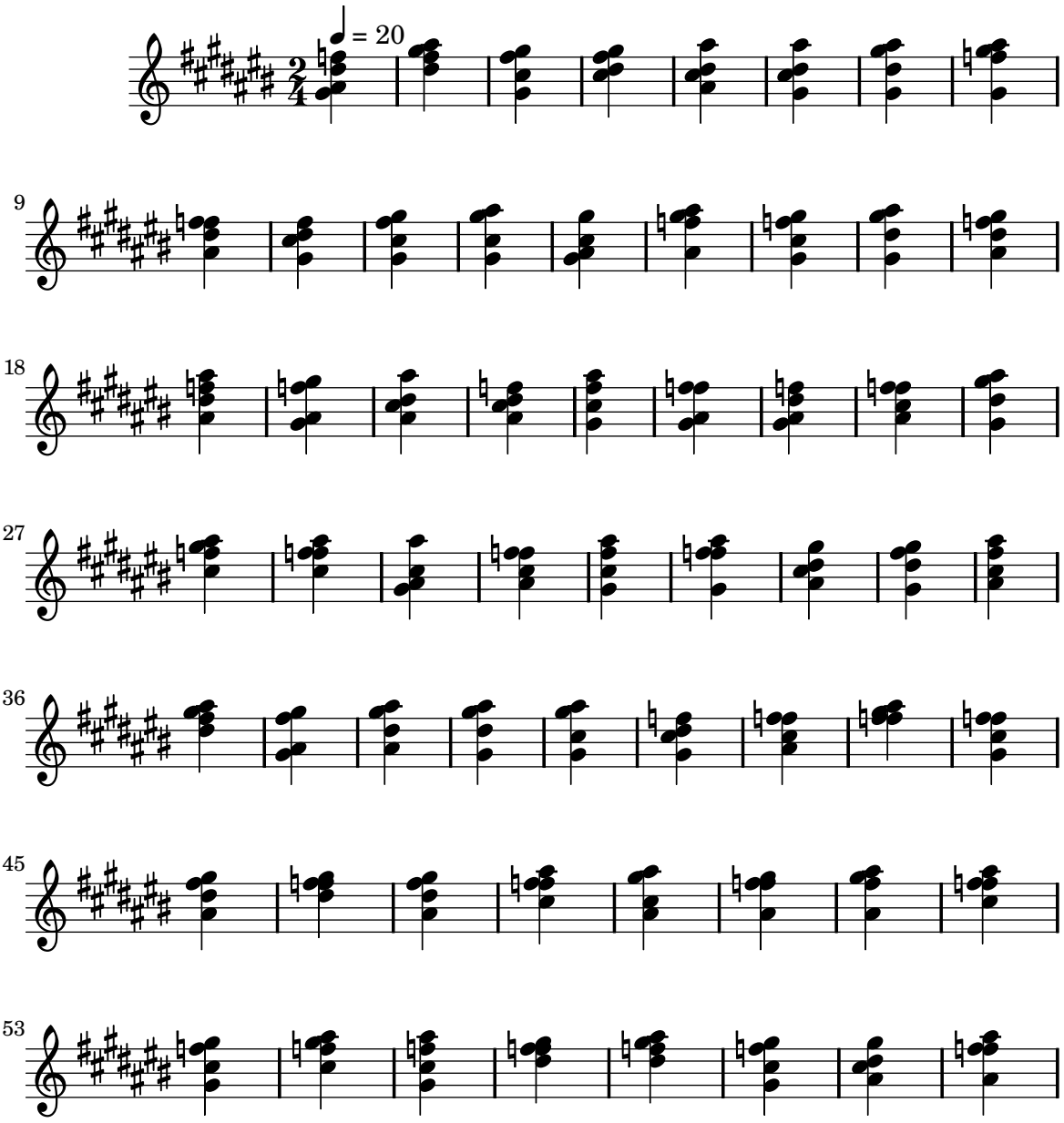


# Freedom From Happiness

## C# 92-106 -2  Part I

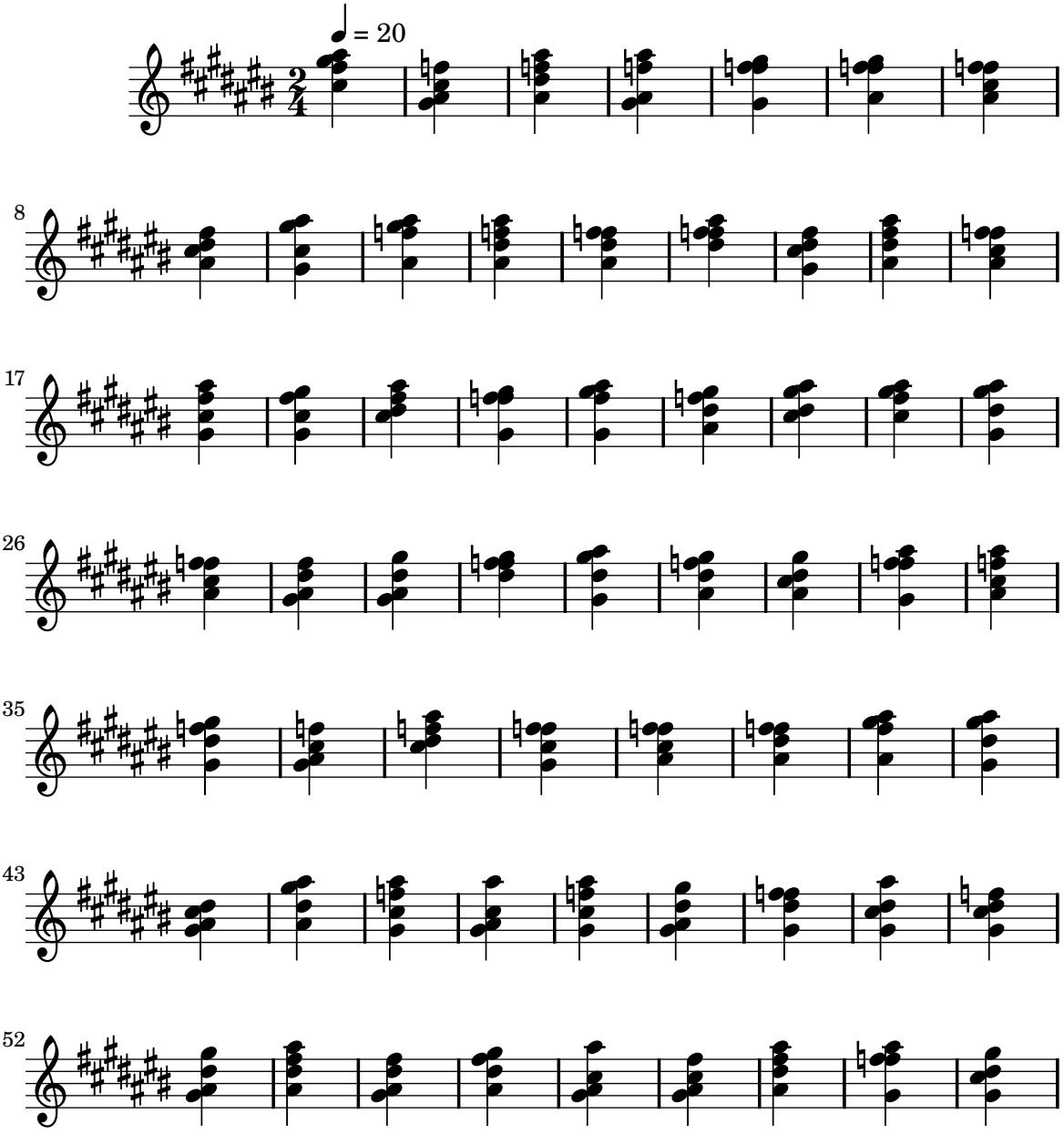
Transposed -2 octaves; play this part 2 octaves above where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 92 94 97 99 101 102 104 106 (where note 60 = middle C).



# Freedom From Happiness

C# 92-106 -2  Part II

Transposed -2 octaves; play this part 2 octaves above where it is here shown.

Generated from MIDI note numbers: 92 94 97 99 101 102 104 106 (where note 60 = middle C).