Bassline

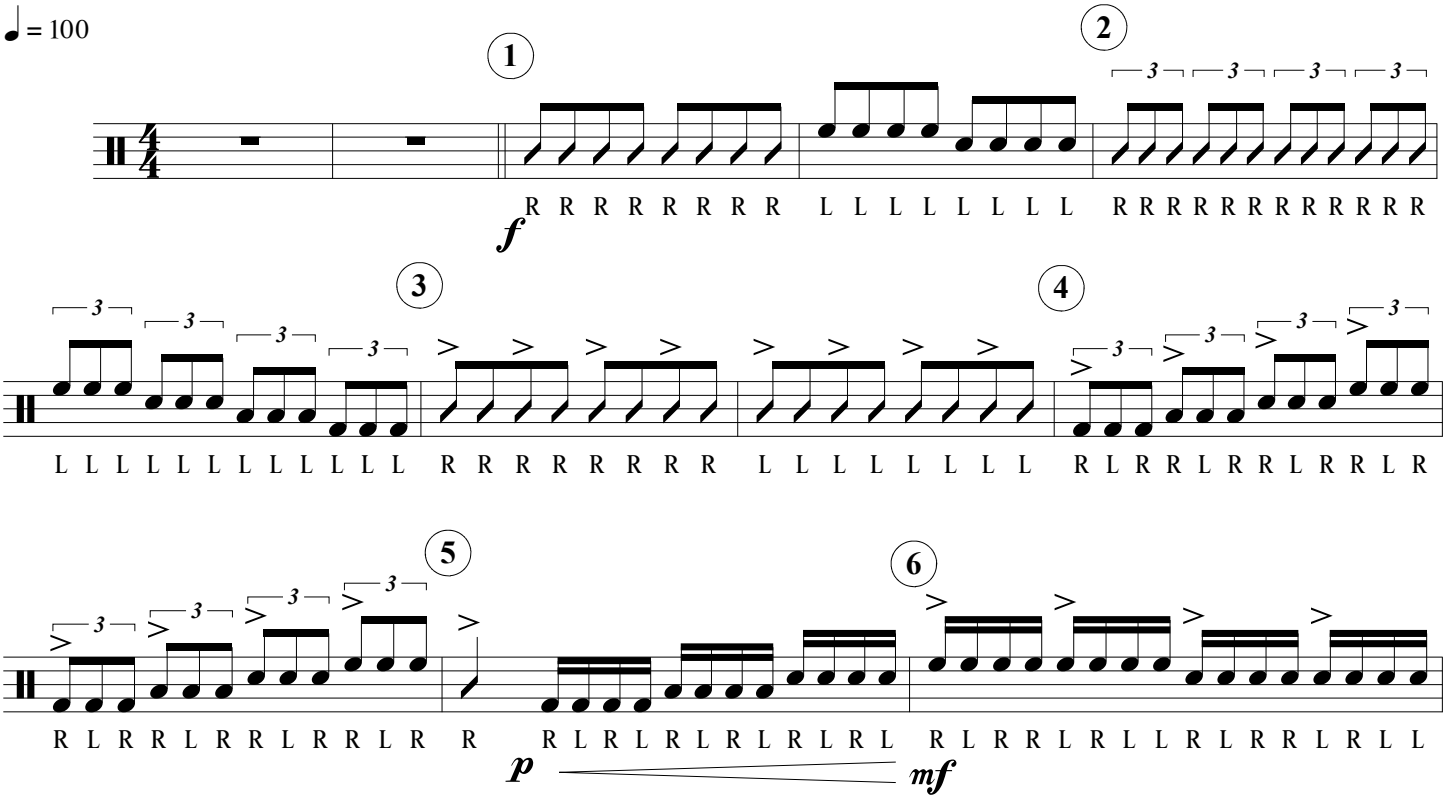
Torque Test

Patrick R. F. Blakley

A tractor-pull-style drumline assessment!

This is a drumline assessment built to demonstrate the ability level of a group (or individuals) so a composer knows what material and skills to include in their writing. The deeper you get into this music, the higher the skill level of the ensemble, kind of like a tractor pull. It's meant to reveal what the group can actually handle when they're locked in, so use it at the end of a warmup block or at the end of rehearsal. The goal is simple. Get an honest read on the ensemble's ceiling so you can write music that fits their real capability. It's intentionally designed to be played with minimal prep, so don't rehearse it first. That keeps the performance authentic. However, feel free to take it one measure or section at a time if needed!

Feel free to take several reps to get an accurate result, and feel free to stop and start again at any rehearsal markings after making clarifications if it helps you move further. Just don't spend too much time trying to perfect things. The goal is not to play clean here, but to assess the potential material that can be achieved by the performers. Mark time through the entire exercise for added insight. You can use your best judgment to assess things that are being played fairly closely. Use that information to push the group to the next skill level by the end of the competitive season. **By the end, the torque test tells the truth.**



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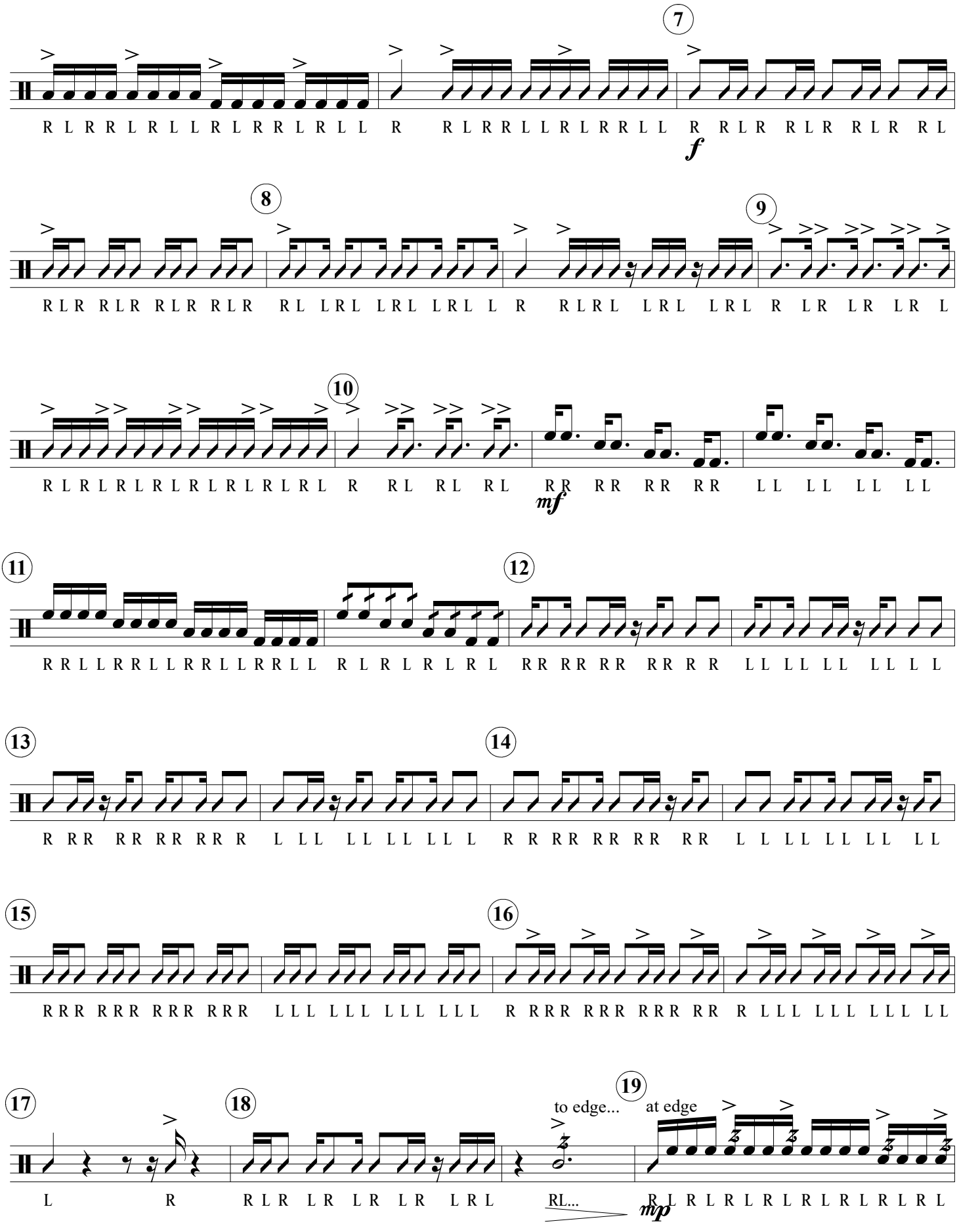
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R L R R L R L L R L R R L R L L R R L R R L L R L R R L L R R L R R L R R L R R L
f
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R L R R L R R L R R L R R L L R L L R L L R L L R R L R L L R L L R L R L R L R L R L
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R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R L R L R L R L R R R R R R R R R R L L L L L L L L L
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14
R R R R R R R R R R L L L L L L L L L L R R R R R R R R R R L L L L L L L L L
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16
R R R R R R R R R R R R L L L L L L L L L L L R R R R R R R R R R R R L L L L L L L L L
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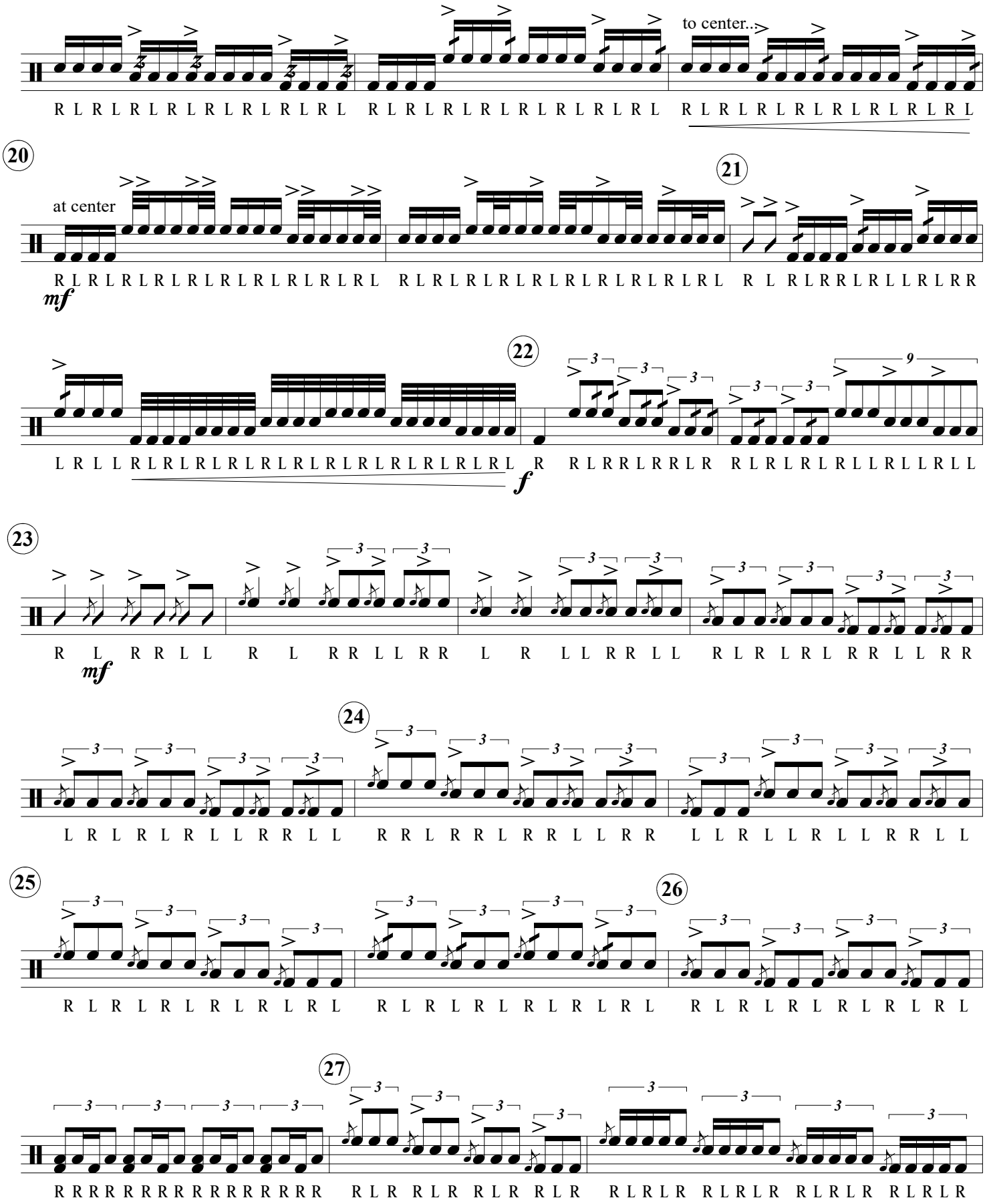
to edge...
at edge
L R R L R L R L R L R L R L RL...
mp
R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L


to center..
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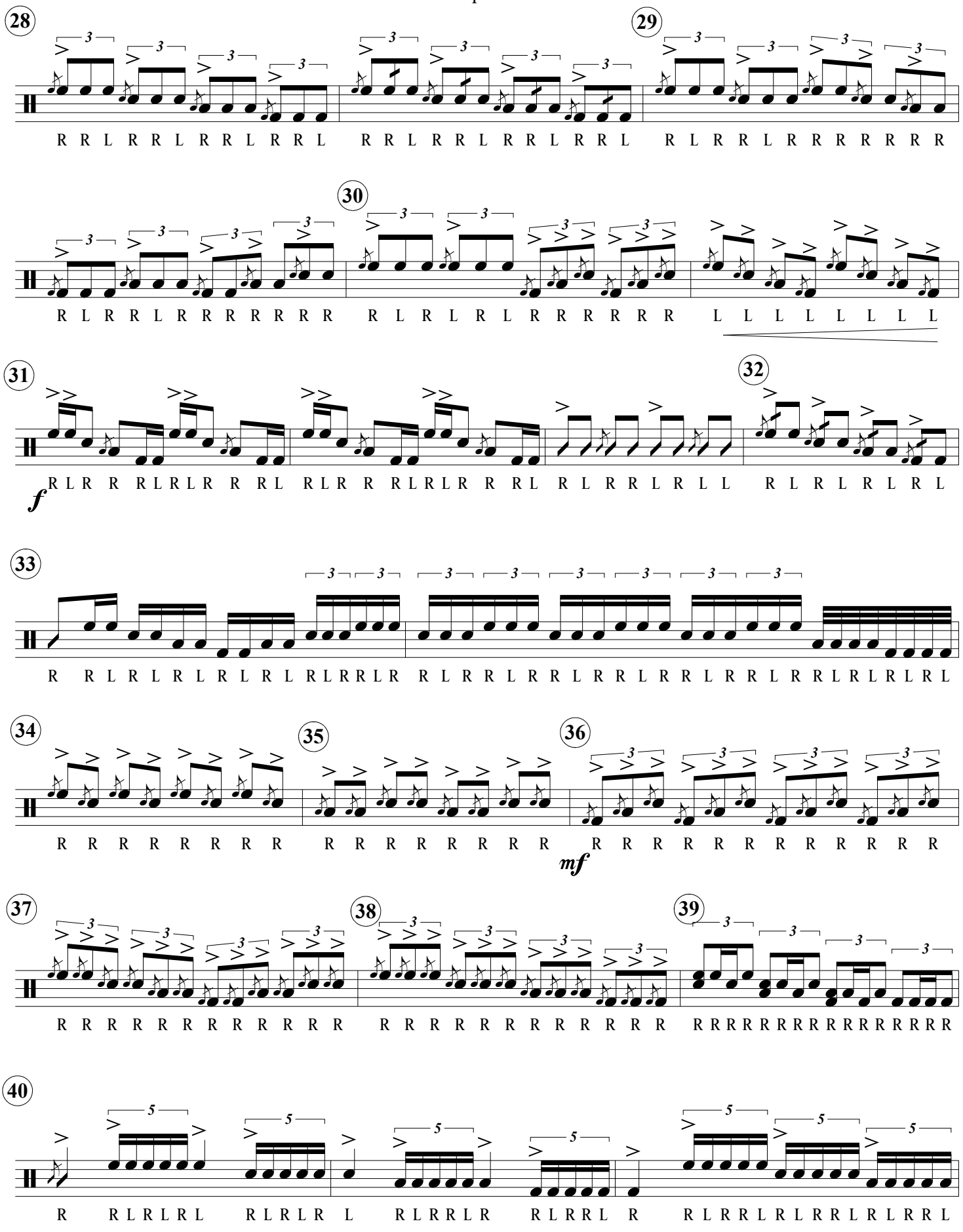
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fff

Torque Test Results Info

This drumline exercise gets more difficult as it progresses. That means you can assess the full group's ability level based on how far they can play through this music, similar to a tractor pull!

The snare rhythm can be the primary focus for the entire drumline if you so choose. This will assess individuals more than the drumline as a whole, if that's what is preferred. That being said, the rhythms for all sections of the drumline are not necessarily meant for the performers to be sight-reading, but they should also not take much processing power to understand what is being asked of them in each section. This means that a drumline that is quite comfortable with certain skills at each ability level will recognize what is intended for each section of music almost at a glance. That being said, feel free to stop and peck out certain measures as needed; this exercise does NOT need to be played from top to bottom (especially since there are multiple page turns).

The tenor around patterns and bass drum split parts are intentionally simplified to feel more intuitive. The focus of this exercise is rhythmic confidence rather than melodic complexity. If these two sections are comfortable with a given rhythm, it can be a reasonable assumption that they can effectively apply that rhythm around the drums.

Level 1: *May get up to about section 2 with guidance, but will do so without a refined technique.*
Level 2: *Can probably get up to about section 3, but may still also sacrifice technique for the rhythms.*
Level 3: *May get up to about section 8, but will probably struggle with the accents and only play rhythms.*
Level 4: *May get up to about section 19 with better accenting, but might struggle with even doubles.*
Level 5: *Can probably get up to section 23, but diddles/accents combined are effectively uncontrolled.*
Level 6: *Will play pretty well up to section 36, but may struggle to keep time with faster flams.*
Beyond 6: *Potentially can push all the way to the end, but may show weaknesses with certain hybrids.*

Check out my articles on the standard percussion levels for more in-depth analysis:
DrumlineWarmups.com/Levels

Remember, we're assessing the entire drumline as a whole for the purposes of composing a drum book that they will achieve by the end of the season. If one member can play through everything, but most can't get past a certain point, the writing needs to reflect the majority and not the individuals that shine through. Don't treat this like a contest; you're looking for authentic results. Most composers want to push their performers to learn some new skills, so you should consider writing within the gray area in which your group can refine some skills at the edge of their abilities!