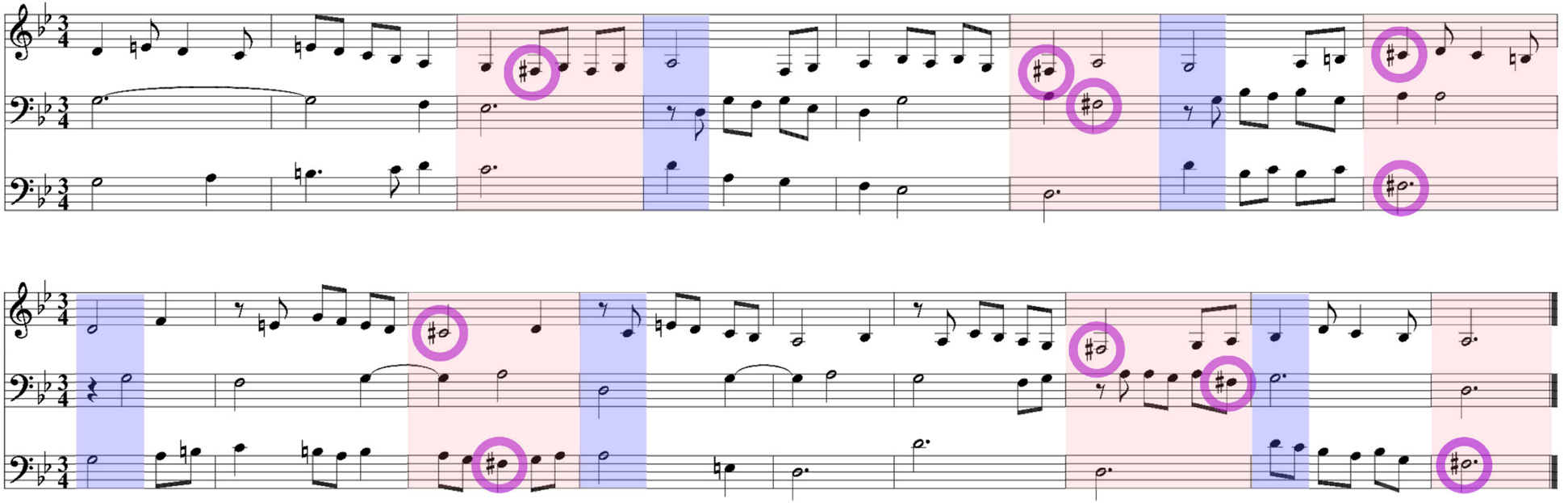
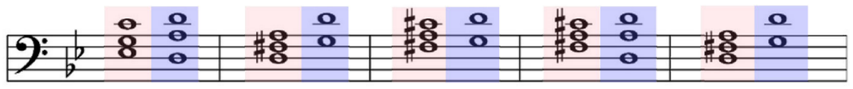
Moments of triadic sonority in cadences with leading tones,
in Guillaume de Machaut, *Biaute qui toutes autres pere* (c. 1340).





Composers in the fourteenth century avoided triadic sonorities if they could help it. In Pythagorean tuning they're not a pretty thing. For example, if you were to steep your ears for a while in recordings of thirteenth-century music, the one thing that would end up feeling most seriously unidiomatic is the sixth, both major and minor. It just doesn't belong.

Both sixth and third were thought to be imperfect, not only because the pitches do not blend nicely in Pythagorean tuning, like the fifth and octave, but also because they come in two sizes, major and minor. Of a perfect thing there can only be one version, not two.

Still, composers found a place for triadic sonorities in the cadence, a new kind of chord progression, in which you moved from an imperfect triadic chord to a perfect fifth-octave sonority. Going from imperfect to perfect is like growth towards a natural end. So the progression should be a satisfying one to hear.

Imperfect sonorities were let in, but only as second-class citizens, inferior to the perfect fifth-octave sound. They were introduced for no other purpsose than to always immediately give way to their betters.

Still, they would have their revenge in the fifteenth century, when cadences increasingly ended on triads. Yet it would take appropriately tempered tuning to make them palatable.