Jazz Saxophone Improvisation Manual

Bb

Introduction

Learning to improvise in the jazz idiom has many times been compared to learning a new language. Like learning a new language, learning to improvise jazz is mostly learned through listening and imitation. After all, music is auditory.

There are many tools that can help such as theory, transcriptions, and written exercises. However, they would not make a difference if the student does not spend a great amount of time listening to music and making music.

This manual is designed to explain the many theories and concepts behind improvising jazz. The manual is designed to take a closer look at the concepts that great jazz saxophonists implemented in their solos. The manual is designed for the young soloist to grasp a basic understanding of voice leading and theory through the standard jazz repertoire. It does not encompass all the elements that a musician needs to ultimately make great music and is by no means an end all to creating great solos or great music.

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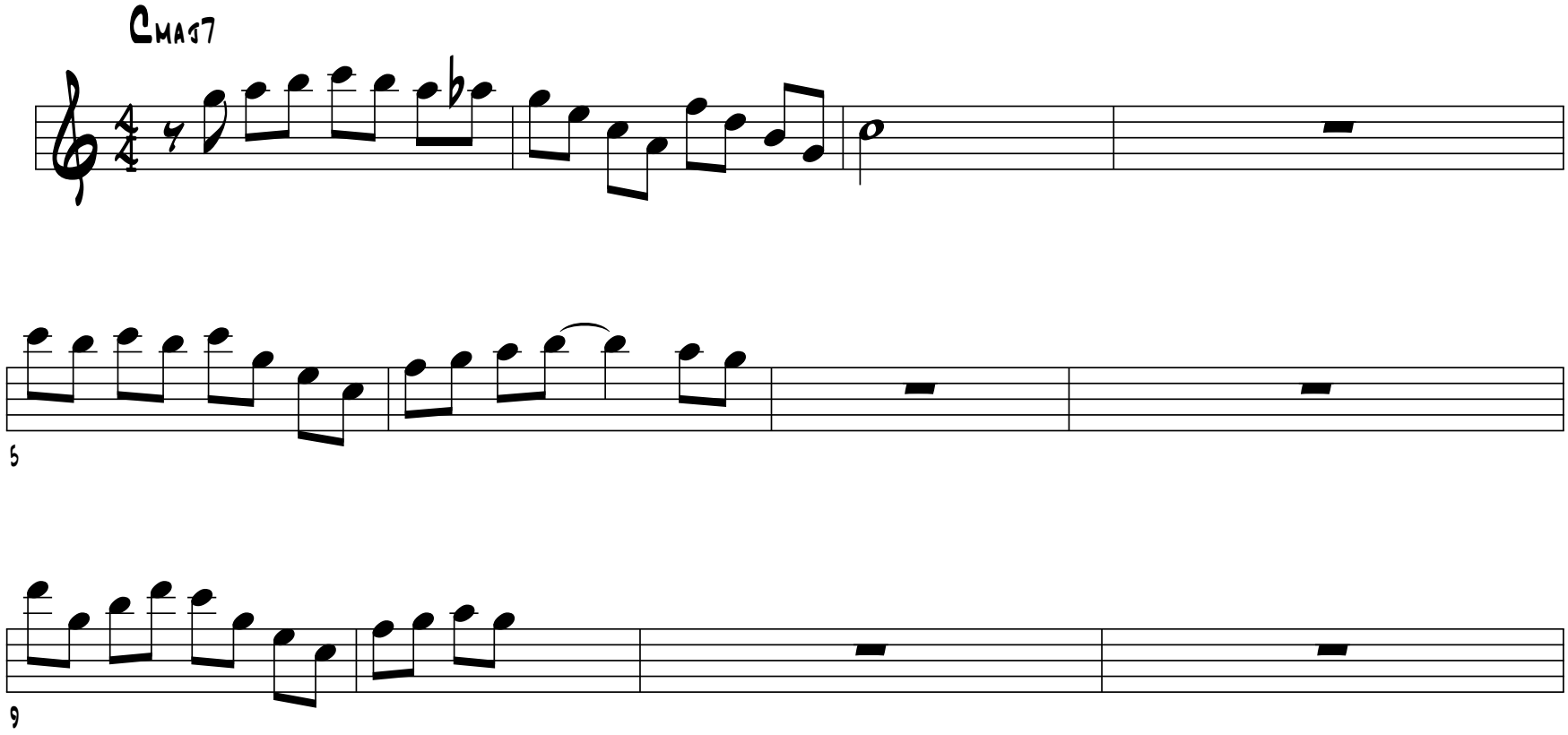
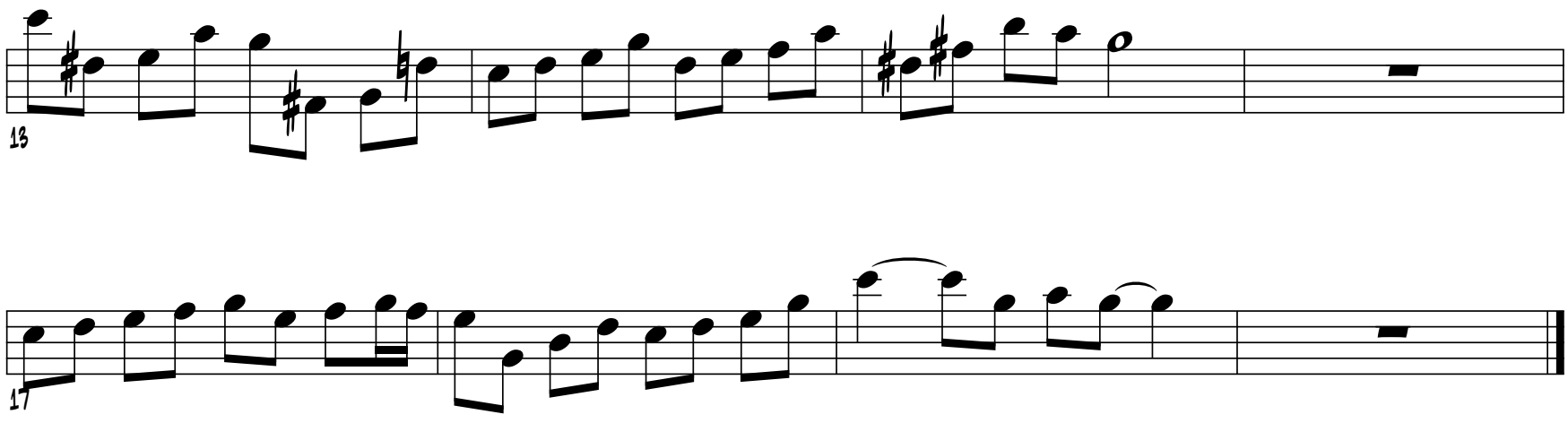
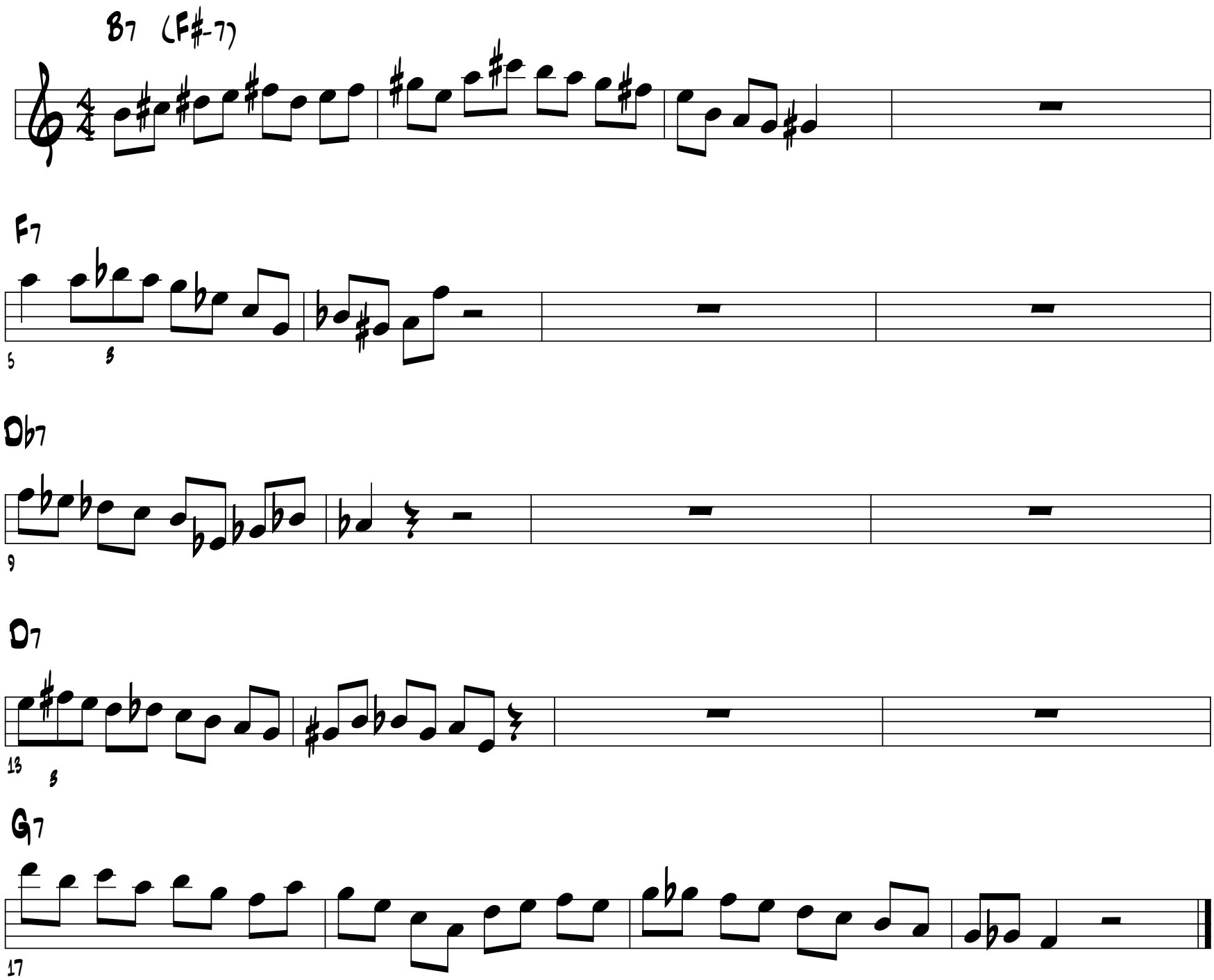
Major, Dominant, Dorian

Major Scale Examples

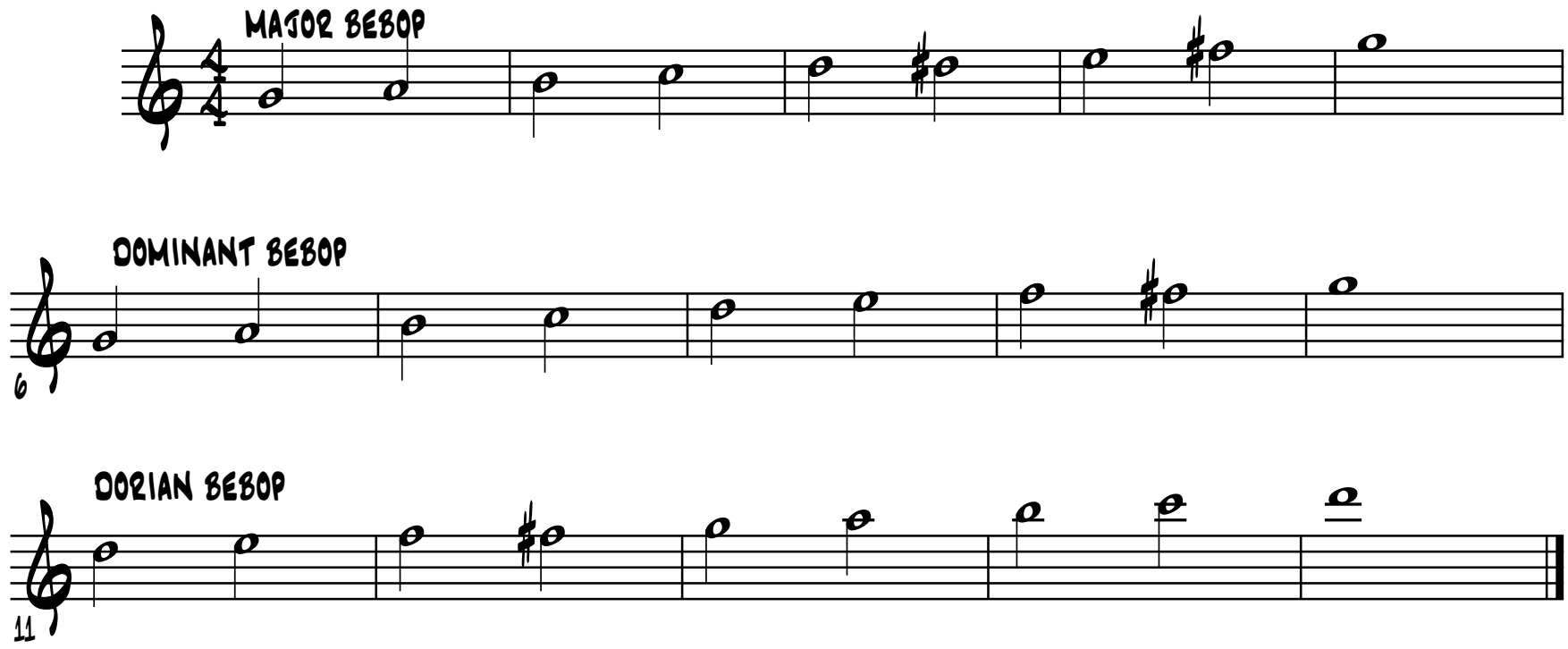




Dominant and Dorian Examples



BeBop Scales



I have always liked to approach improvisation by playing as many tunes as possible. I have never been one to really work on patterns, transpositions of patterns, or playing certain licks in different keys. I like to immerse myself in as many recordings of a tune I am working on and try my hardest to abstract the concepts that the artist is trying to convey. I then try to constantly play over the tune. There are three tunes I like to explore with my students when we are working on Major, Dominant, and Dorian."So What","Dig",and "Flamenco Sketches". I think the melodies and the harmony are great launching points for students to wet their imaginations with those tone pallets.

The following is a transcription of Miles Davis's solo on "So What". It's a great example of how one can play over minor 7 chords. I like to approach think of minor 7 chords as Major scales with a flat 3rd and a flat 7th. In this case for Bb instruments, I would think of it as E major but I will a G natural and a D natural instead of a G# and a D#. Again, I'm being very academic and analytical in this approach. There are really no restrictions as to what you can play over a E-7, but for this purpose I'm trying to break it down to most simple form. One can also think of it as D Major starting on E. "So What" is in the Dorian mode. The second mode of the major scale. I don't really approach it that way but I'm trying to explain it in every angle as to further gain more understanding from the reader.

I would also like to recommend "Dig" by Miles Davis as a great tool to work on the dominant bebop scale. The melody is a great view into how one can use the scale to create ideal jazz melodies and improvisational vocabulary.

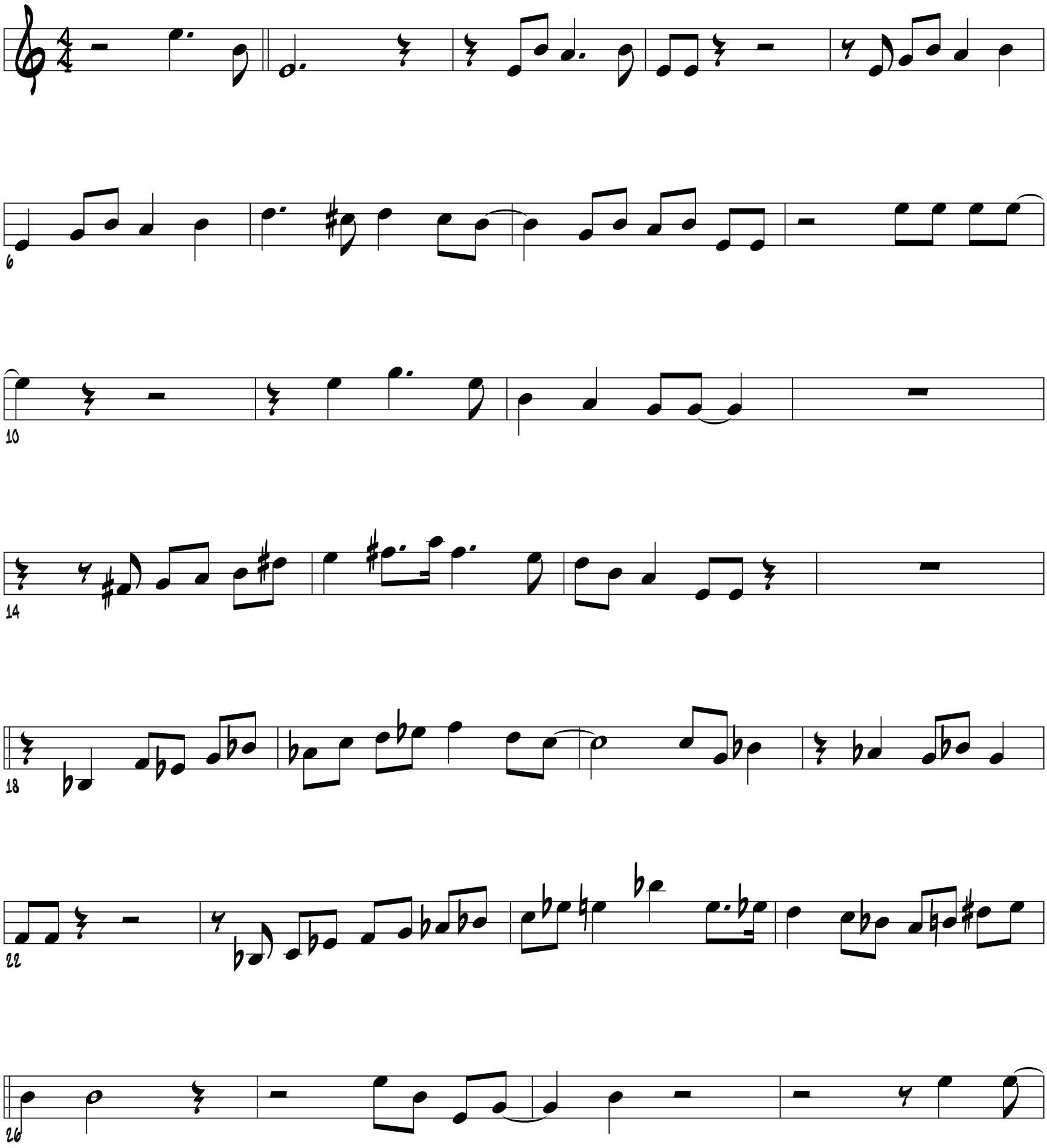
Finally, the last tune I like to play with my students to get them going on the various modes of Major is "Flamenco Sketches". Again, I don't really approach improv studies in terms of "modes" but I feel that this tune allows the young improviser to get a basic feel of jazz harmonies and theory.

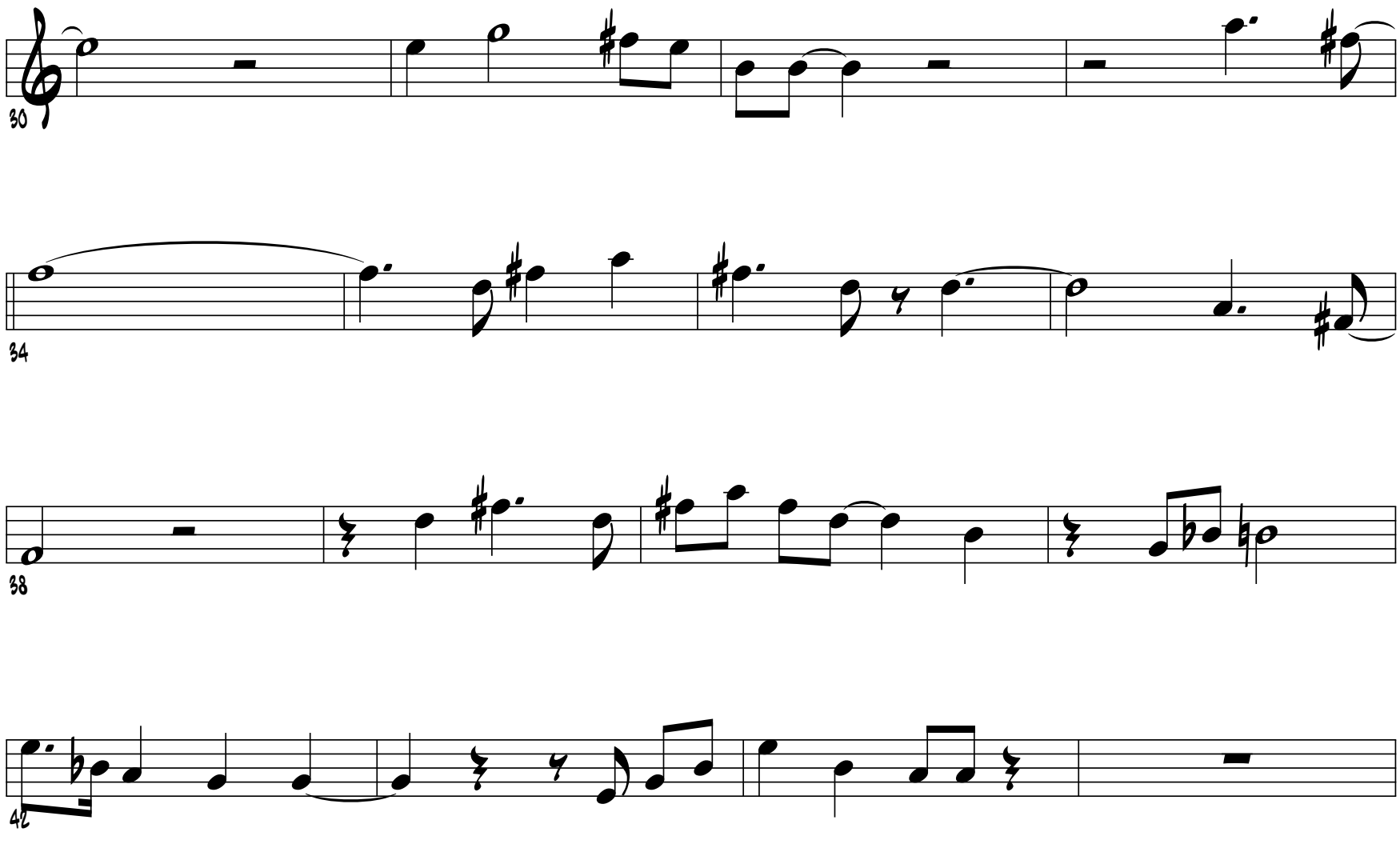
The tune begins in C Major concert and then goes to Ab7. It then goes to Bb Major 7 and sits on a section that many jazz scholars label as D Phrygian. I hear it as G harmonic minor but the more terms you can get familiar with the stronger it will make you. The tune finally resolves to G-7. What I really enjoy about playing this tune is that it's a ballad and it's slow enough for students to grasp the harmony and explore their tonal options.

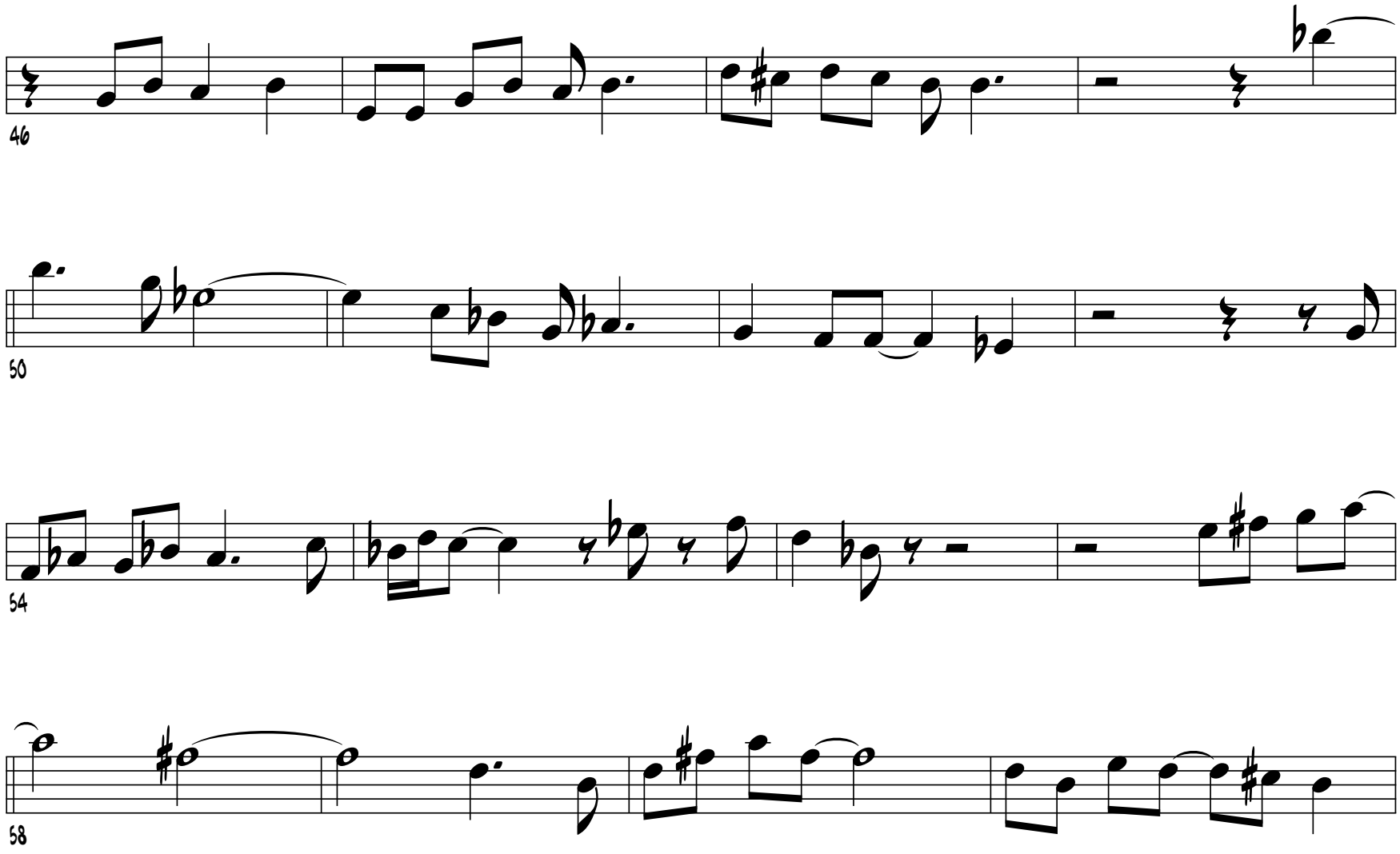
So What

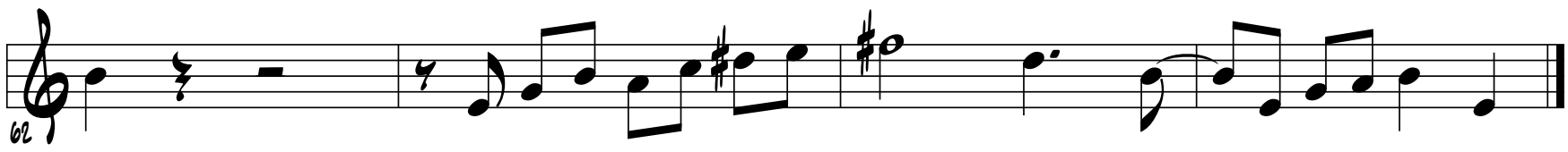
B flat

Miles Davis




30
34
38
42


46
50
54
58


62

Dig

B Flat

Davis

G7

C7

5

F7

9

B♭

13

2. G-

Aø

D7

G-

C-7

F7

17

B♭

G7

C-7

F7

B♭

21

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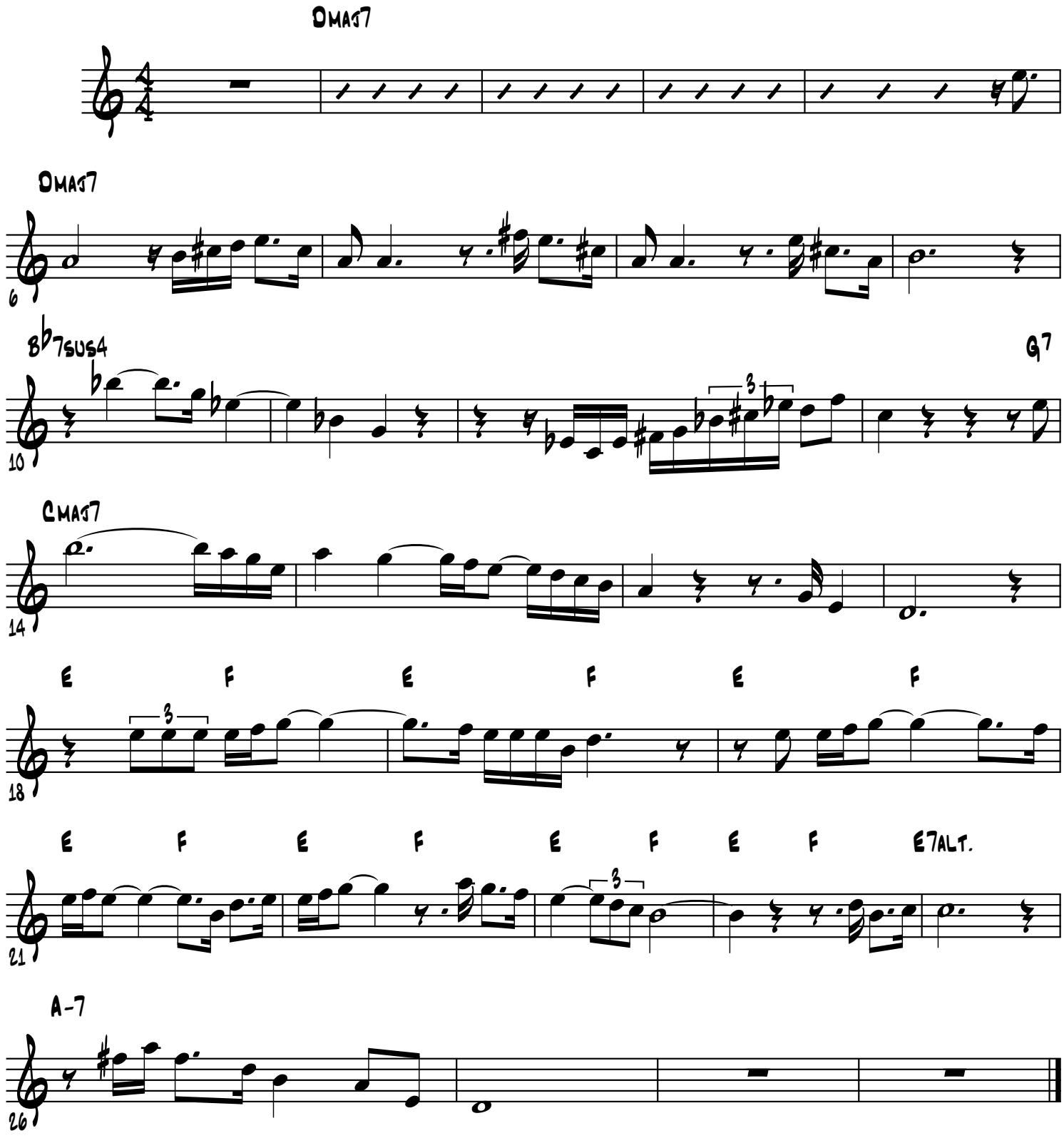
Flamenco Sketches

B Flat

Davis



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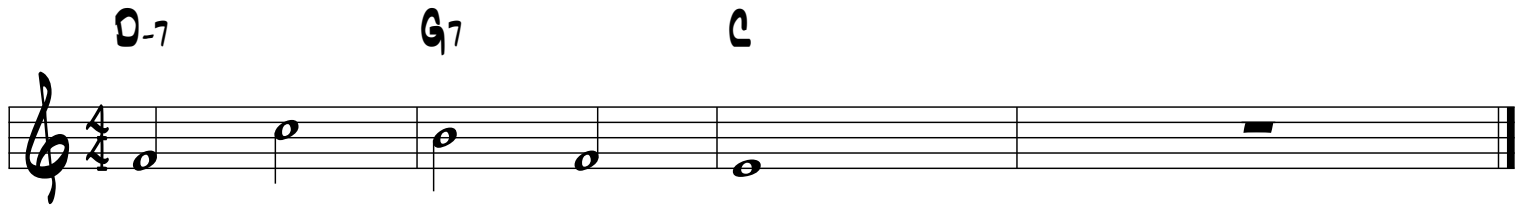
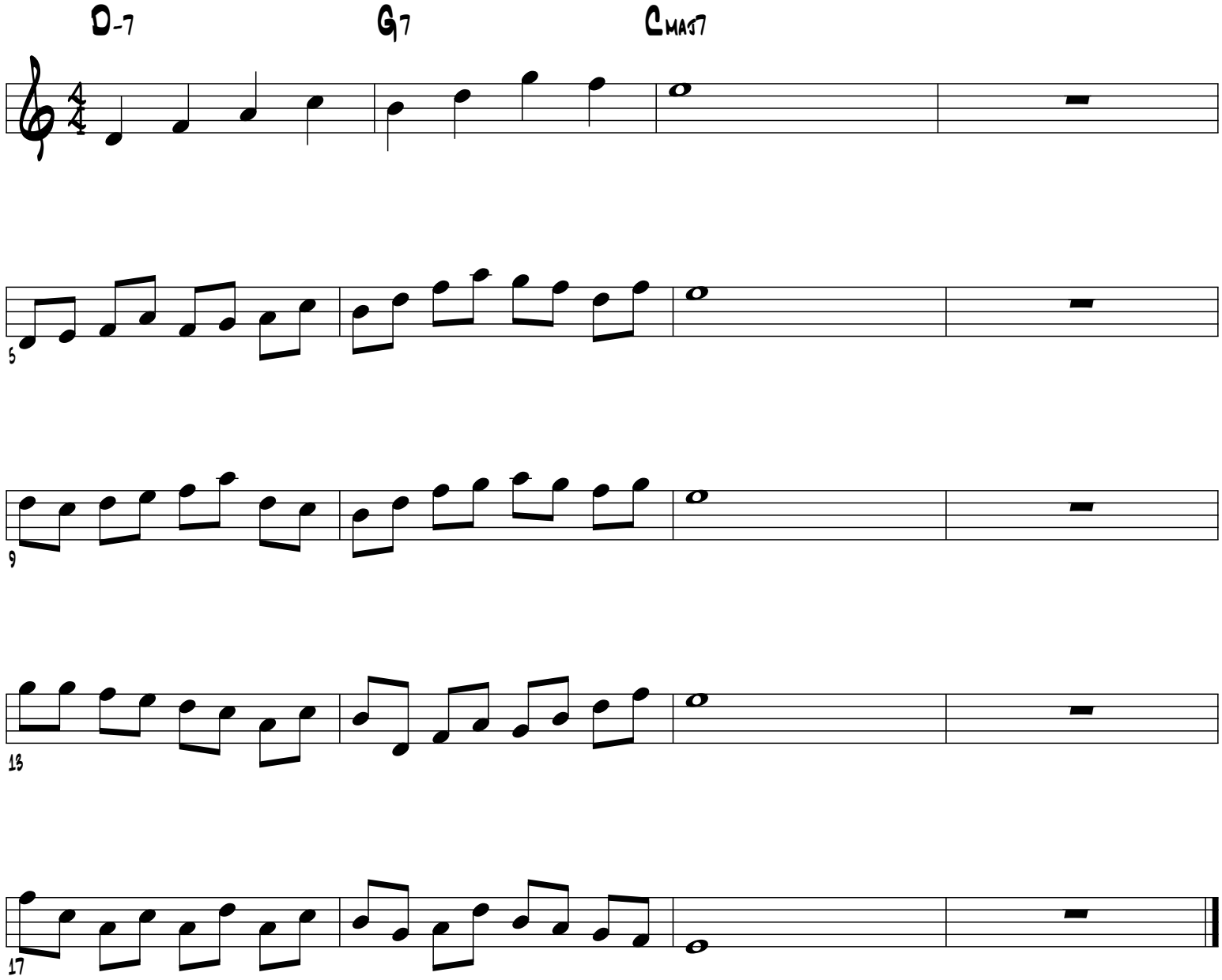
Getting Across the Bar Line

Getting Across the Barline



Getting across the barline

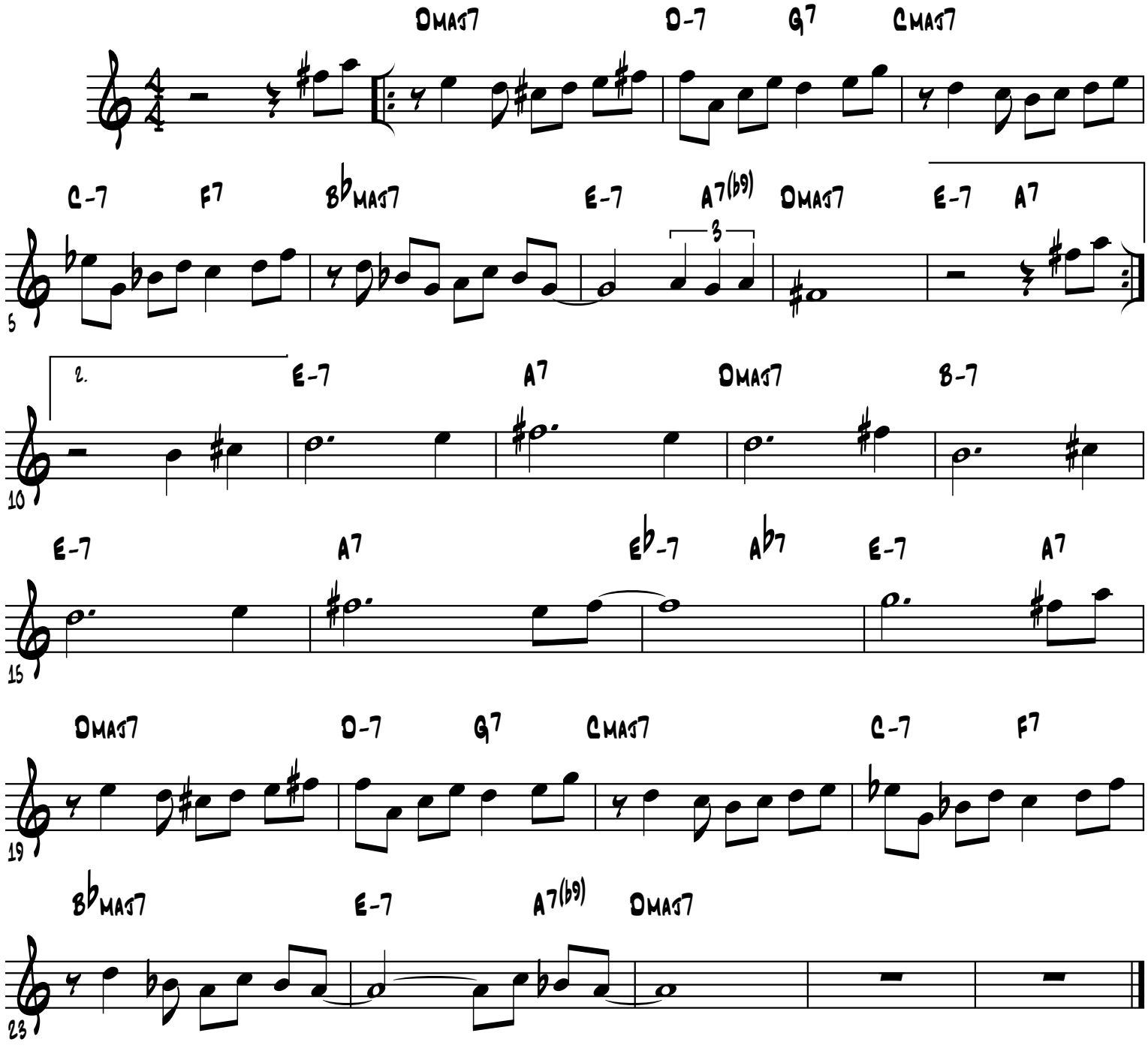
examples



Afternoon in Paris

B Flat

Lewis



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The Blues

B FLAT

The Blues

G7 C7 G7 G7

C7 C7 G7 E7

5

A-7 D7 G7 E7 A-7 D7

9

GMAJ7 E7(b9) A-7 D7

13

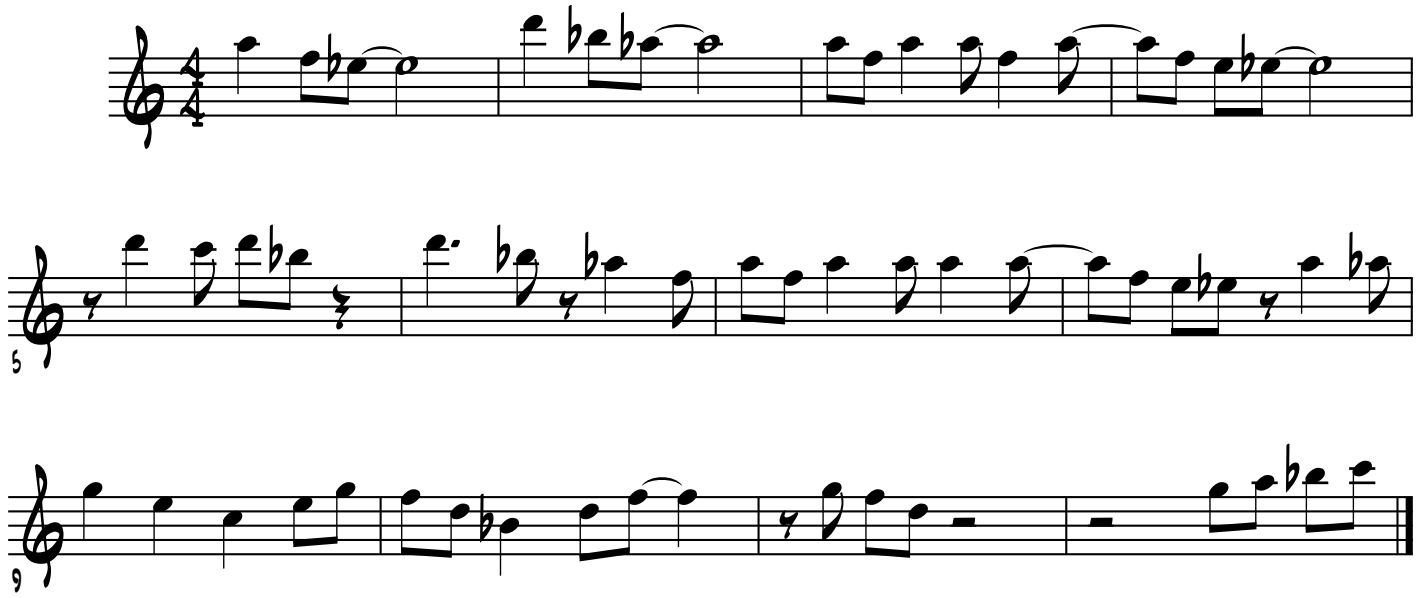
GMAJ7 E7(b9) A-7 D7

17

Bessies Blues

B Flat

Coltrane



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B FLAT

The Breakdown

MOBLEY

Cmaj7 A-7 D-7 G7 C C7 C7

F7 F° Cmaj7 A7b9

5

D-7 G7b9 Cmaj7

9

Cmaj7 F7 F° C6 C7#5

13

F9 C A7b9

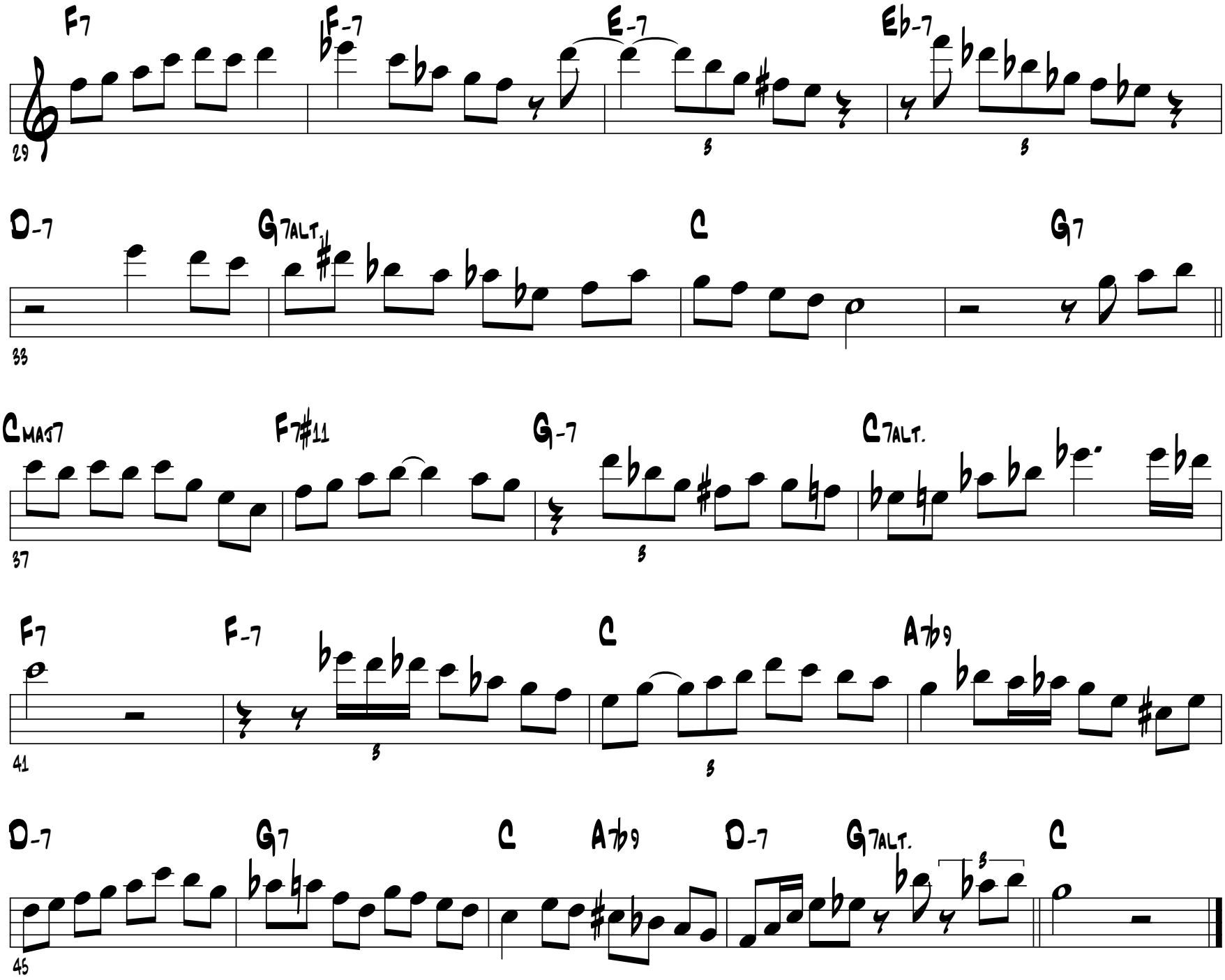
17

D-7 G7 C

21

C7 F7 C C7

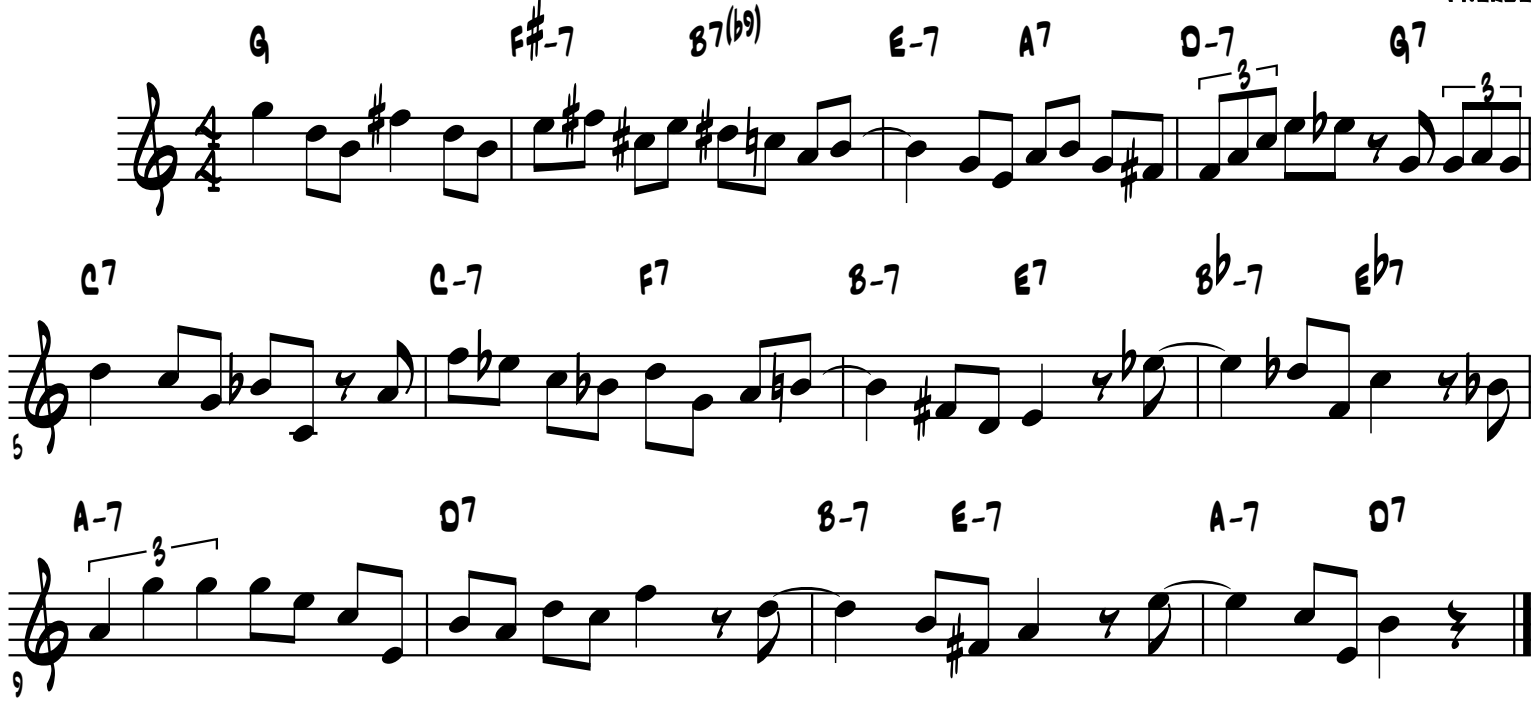
25


F7
F-7
E-7
Eb-7
29
D-7
G7ALT.
C
G7
33
CMAJ7
F7#11
G-7
C7ALT.
37
F7
F-7
C
A7b9
41
D-7
G7
C
A7b9
D-7
G7ALT.
C
45

Blues for Alice

B Flat

Parker



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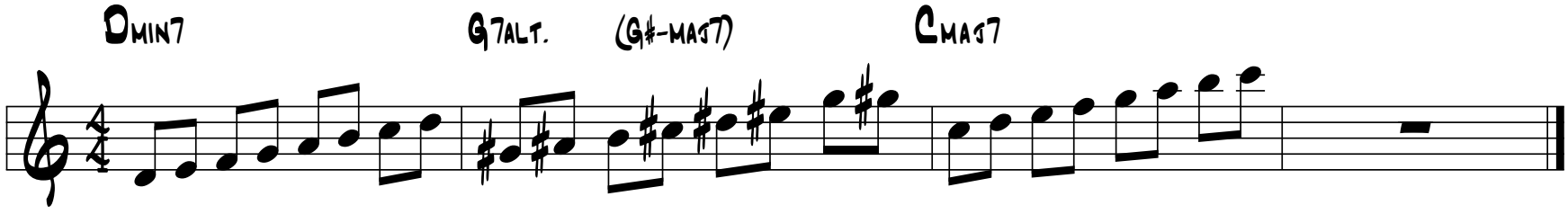
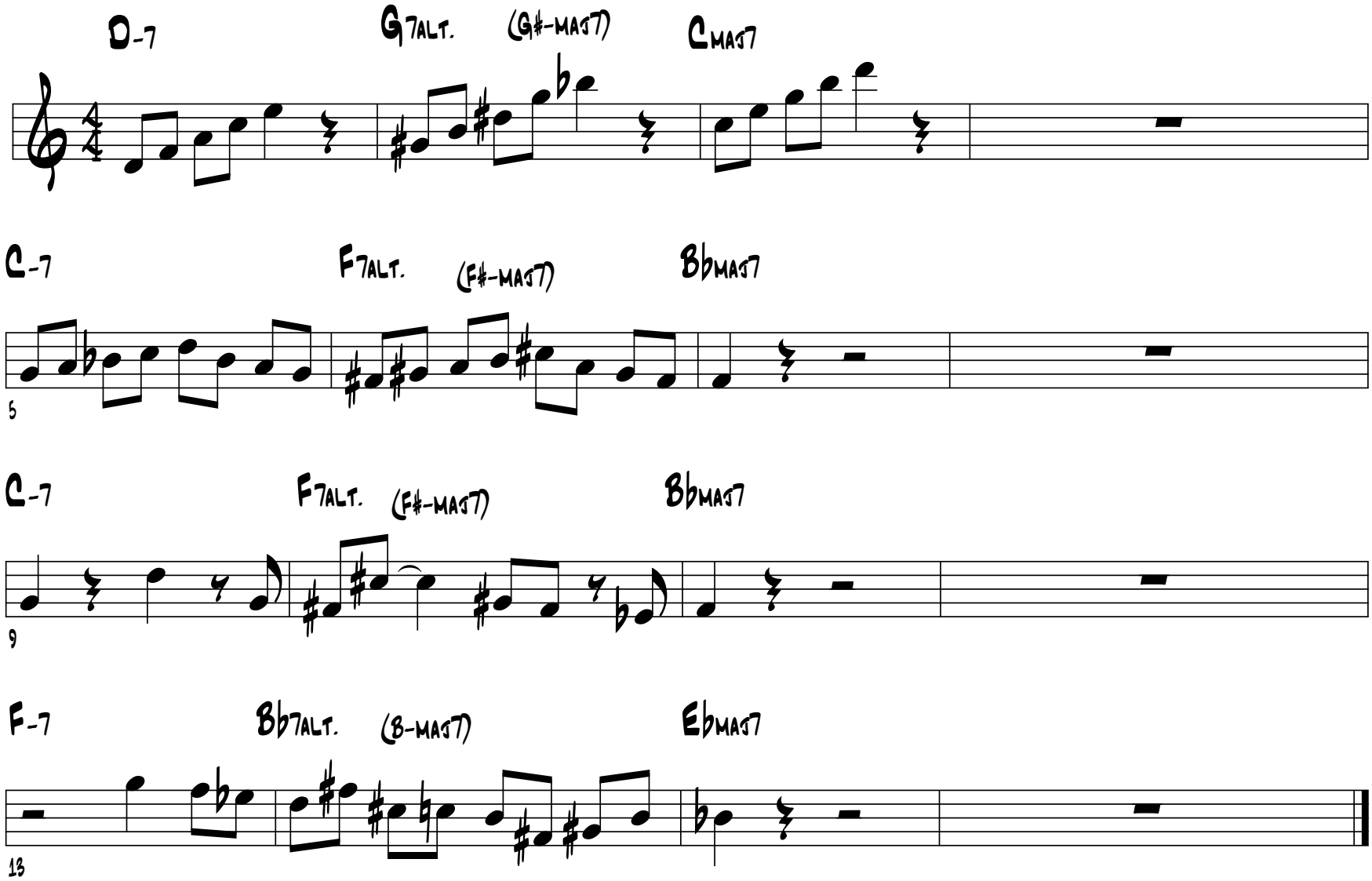
Altering the V7 Chord with Melodic Minor

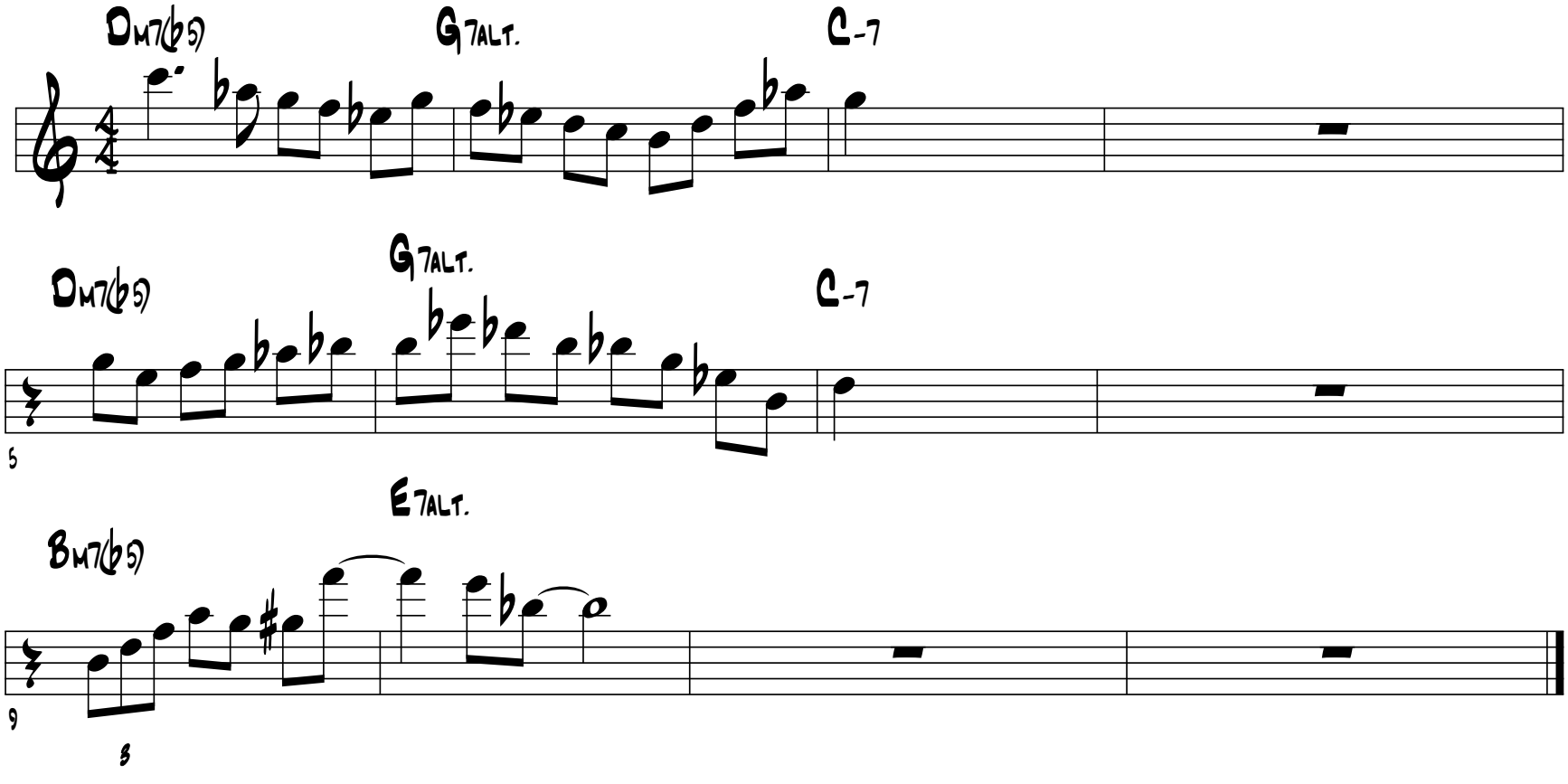
Altering V chord with melodic minor scale



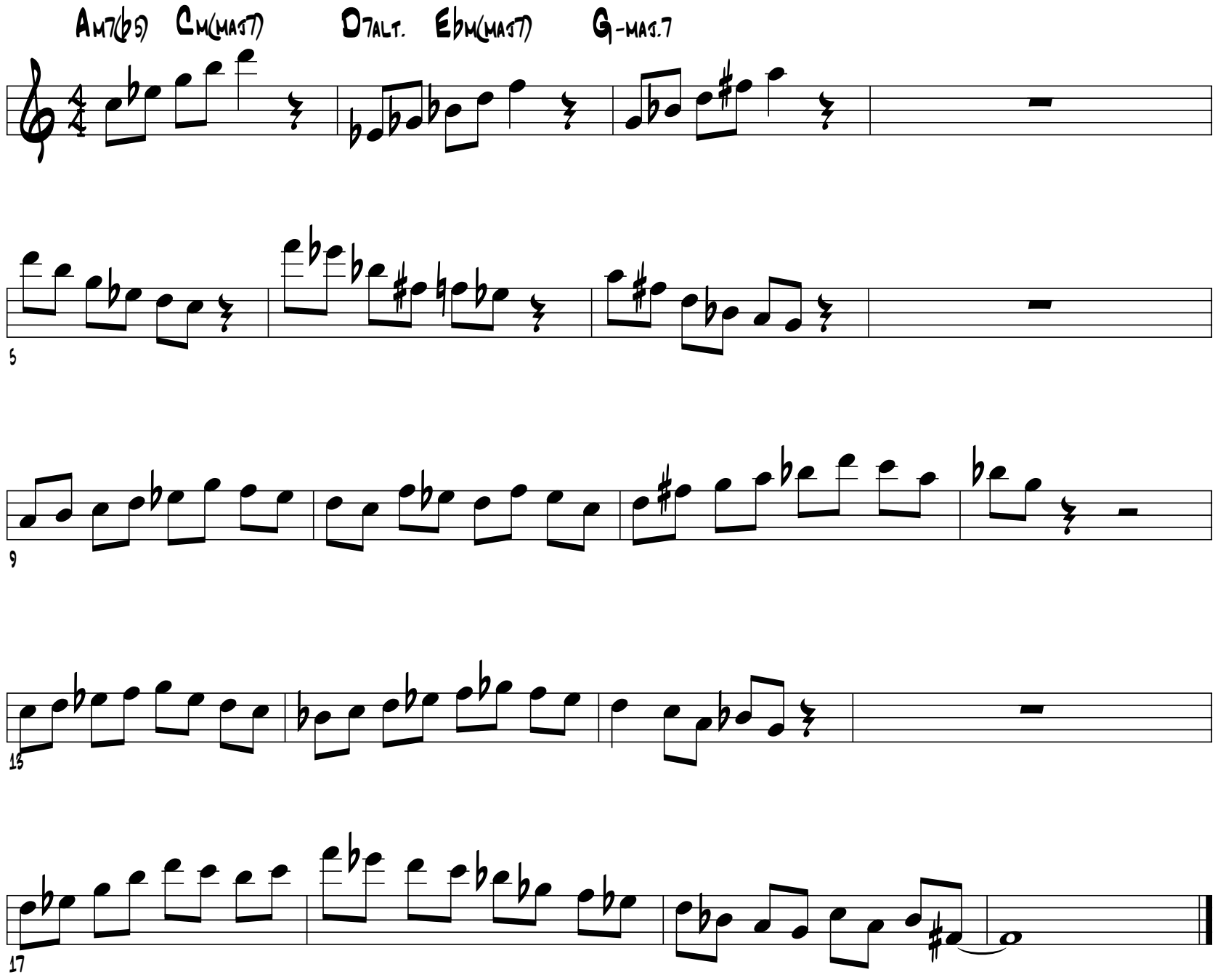
Altering V chords



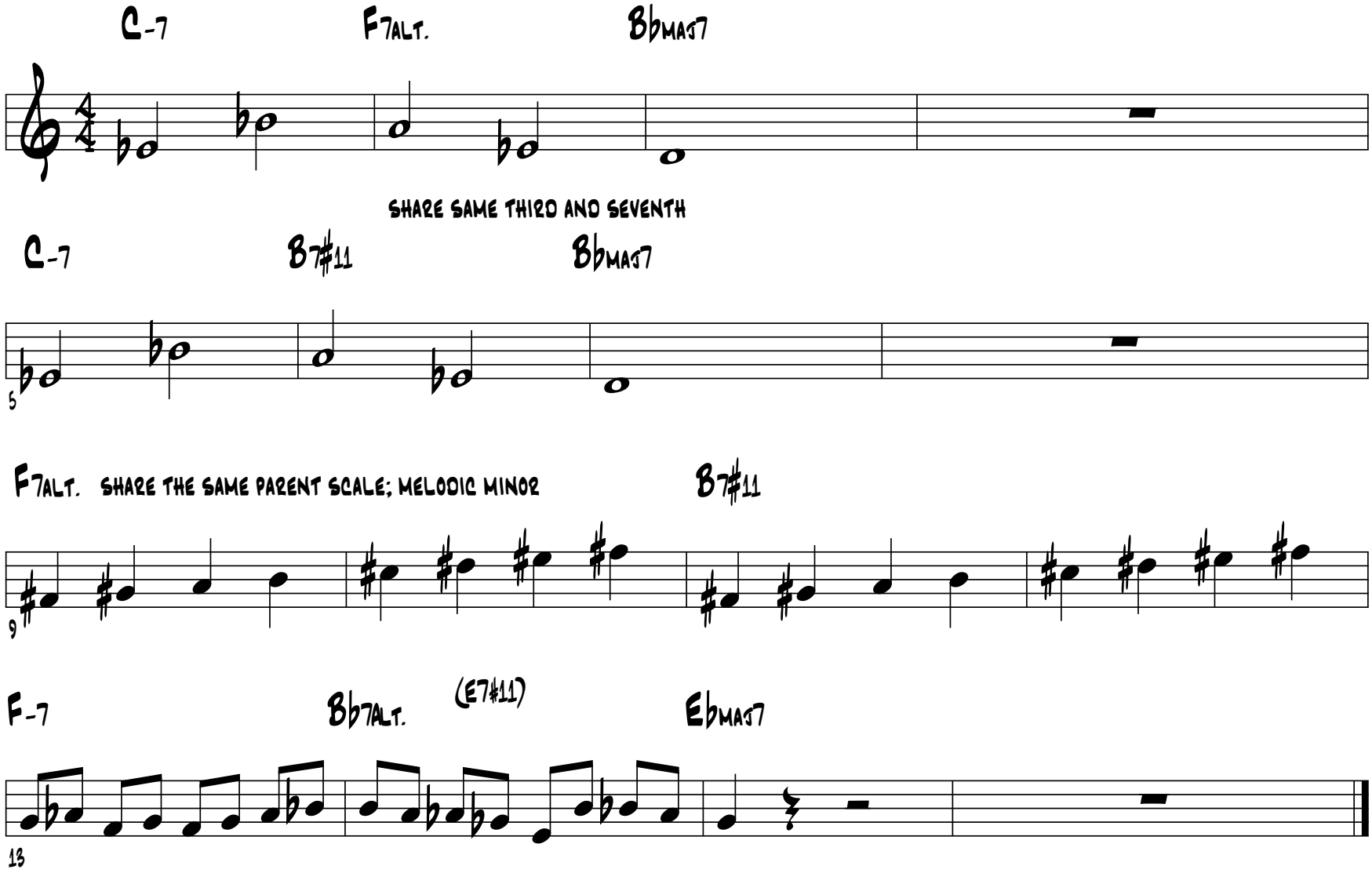
Minor II-V's



Minor ii-V's



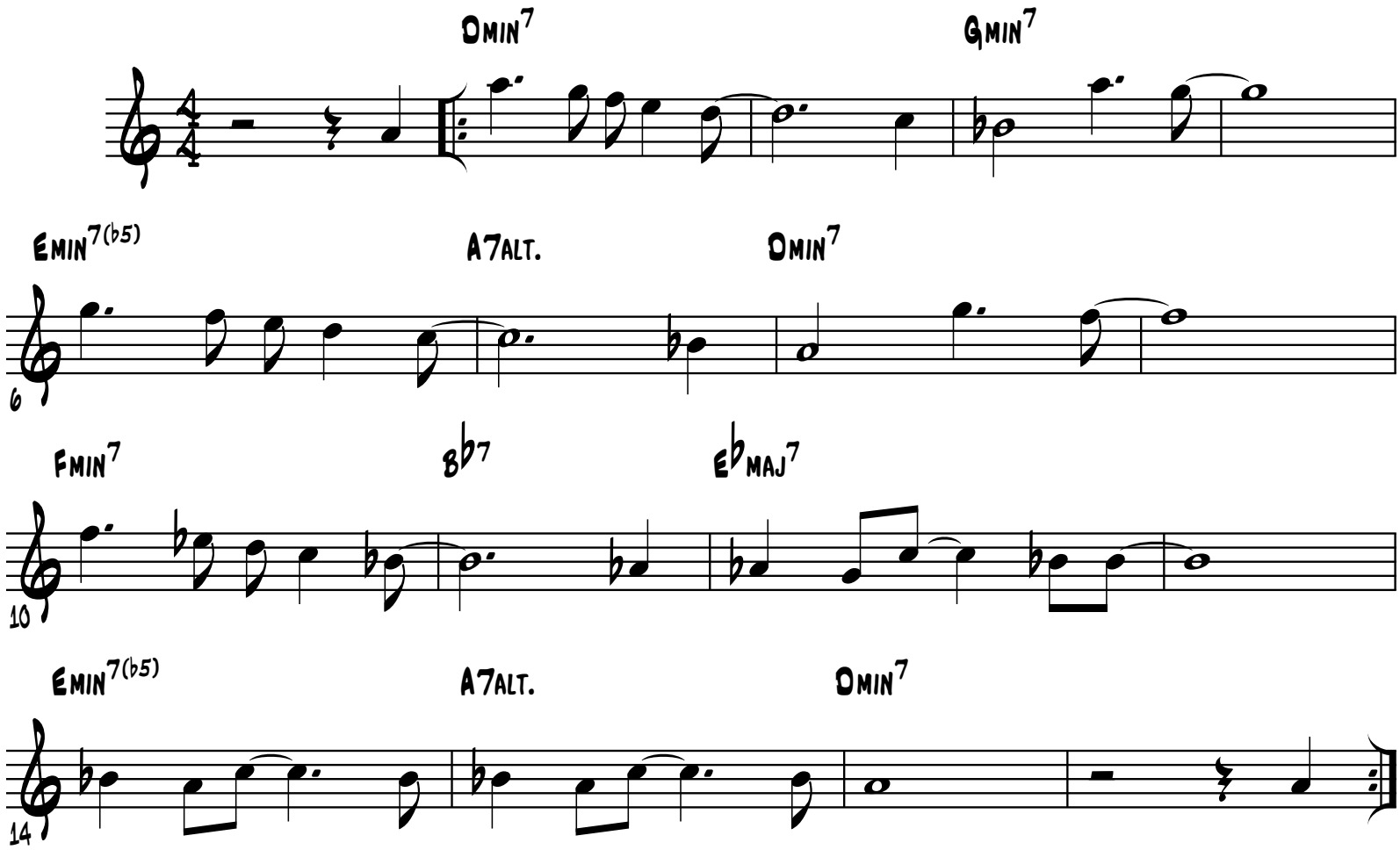
Tri-Tone Subs



Blue Bossa

B Flat

Dorham



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Blue Bossa

B Flat

Dexter Gordon Solo

Dorham

D-7 G-7

Eø A7(b9) D-7

7

F-7 B♭7 E♭7

11

Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

15

D-7 G-7

19

Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

23

F-7 B♭7 E♭MAJ7

27

Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

31

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Blue Bossa

D-7 G-7

35

Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

39

F-7 B♭7 E♭MAJ7

43

Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

47

D-7 G-7

51

Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

55

F-7 B♭7 E♭MAJ7

59

Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

63

D-7 G-7

67

71 Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

75 F-7 B♭7 E♭MAJ7

79 Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

83 D-7 G-7

87 Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

91 F-7 B♭7 E♭MAJ7

95 Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

99 D-7 G-7

103 Emi7(b5) A7(b9) D-7

BLUE BOSSA

107
F-7 | B♭7 | E♭MAJ7

111
Emi7(b5) | A7(b9) | D-7

115
D-7 | G-7

119
Emi7(b5) | A7(b9) | D-7

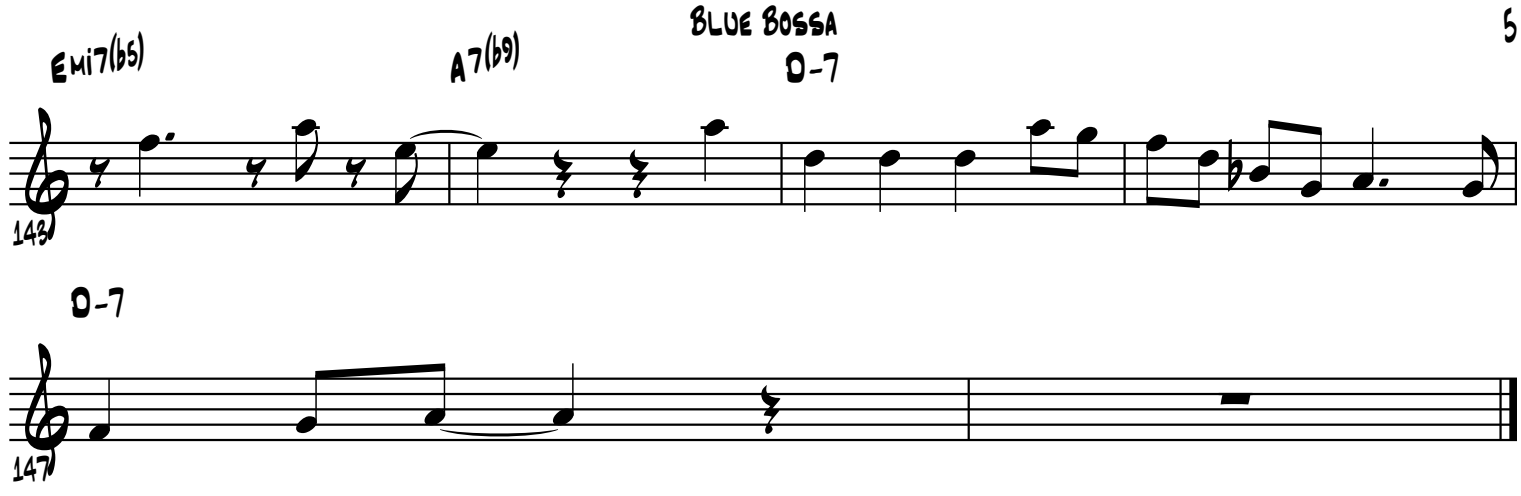
123
F-7 | B♭7 | EMAJ7

127
Emi7(b5) | A7(b9) | D-7

131
D-7 | G-7

135
Emi7(b5) | A7(b9) | D-7

139
F-7 | B♭7 | E♭MAJ7

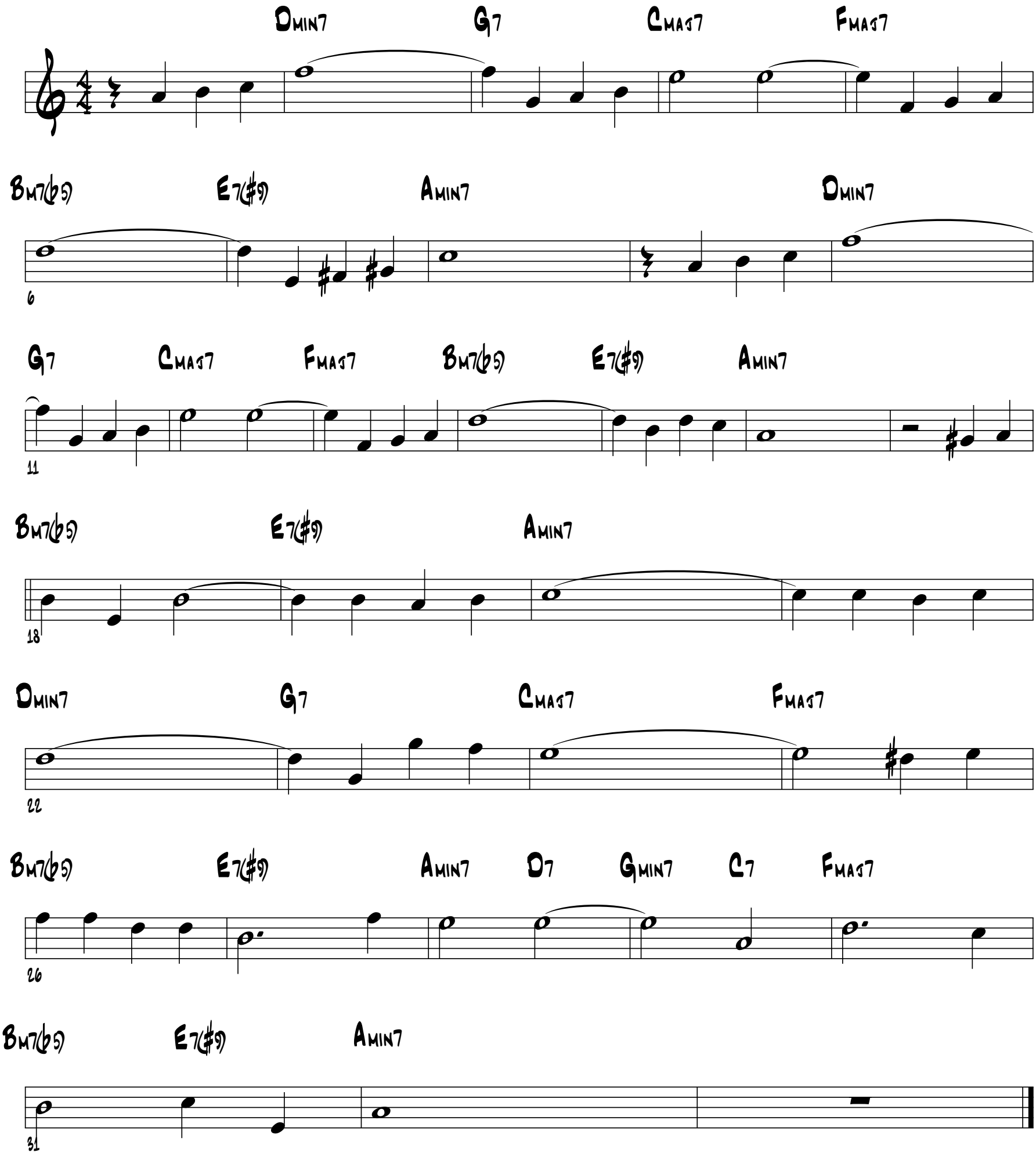

Emi7(b5)
A7(b9)
D-7
143
D-7
147

An exercise I like to with students is having them write a chorus over a standard to see if they are understanding the concepts that we have discussed. I feel that it slows down the process of improvisation and provides a visual component to understanding voice leading. Being a saxophonist, we don’t really get to visualize chords on our instrument like a pianist or a guitarist would. I have found in my experience for this to be valuable tool. However, I always do encourage to play and learn by ear as much as possible. To write down etudes and solos is very academic and analytical and not very musical.

In the next two pages I use a common standard,“Autumn Leaves,” to write a simple etude using the concepts that we have covered until this point. Voice leading, bebop scales, and altering chords with the melodic minor scale.

Autumn Leaves

B FLAT



B FLAT

AUTUMN

D-7 G7 CMAJ7

BM7(b5) E7 A-7 A7b9 D-7

5

G7 C F BM7(b5) E7

10

A-7 BM7(b5) E7 A-7

15

A7b9 D-7 G7 CMAJ7 FMAJ7

20

BM7(b5) E7 A-7 D7b9 G-7 C7b9

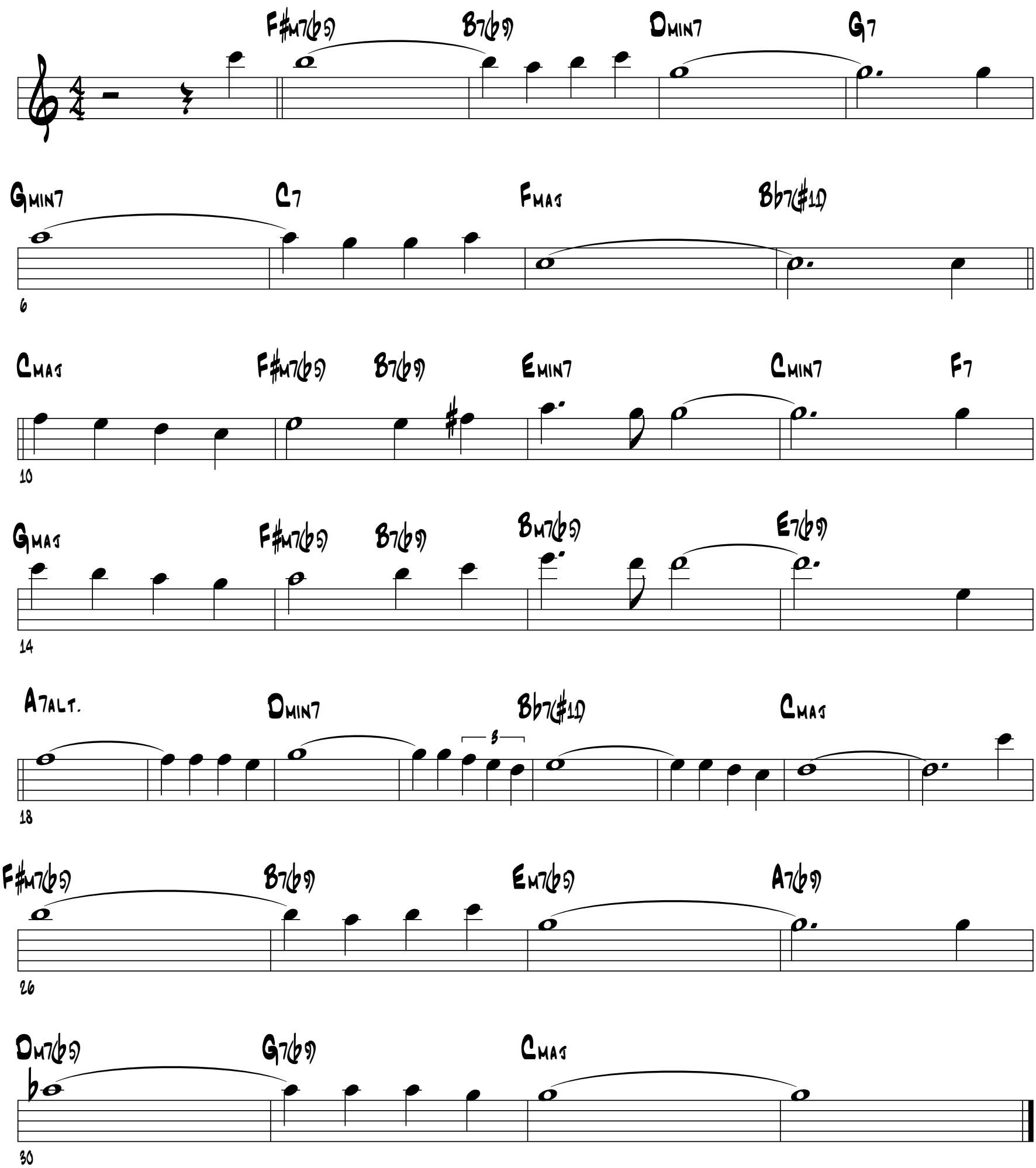
25

F7 E7b9 A-7

29

Stella

B flat



Stella

B FLAT

F#M7(b5) B7b9 D-7 G7ALT. G-7

C7ALT. FMAJ7 Bb7#11 C F#M7(b5) B7b9

6

E-7 C-7 F7 GMAJ7 F#M7(b5) B7b9 BM7(b5)

11

E7ALT. A7ALT. D-7

16

Bb7#11 CMAJ7

20

F#M7(b5) B7b9 EM7(b5) A7b9

25

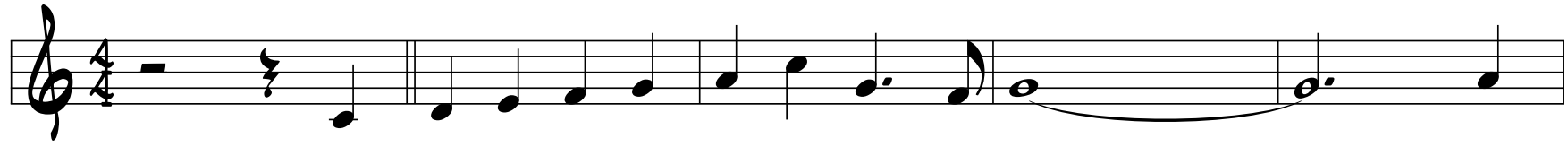
DM7(b5) G7ALT. CMAJ7

29

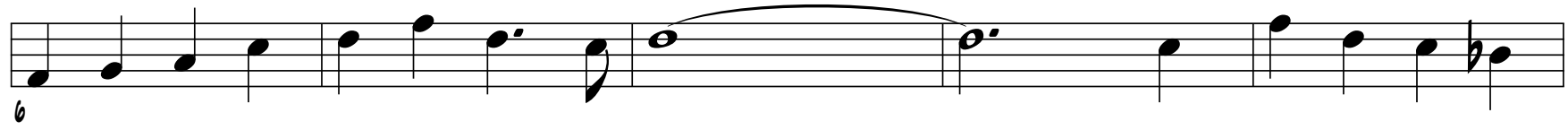
There Will Never Be Another You

B flat

F Em7(b5) A7b9

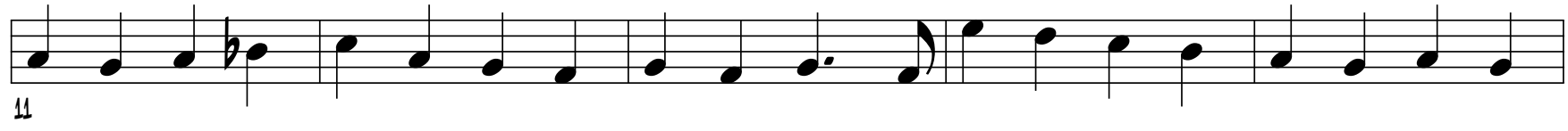


Dmin7 Cmin7 F7 Bb



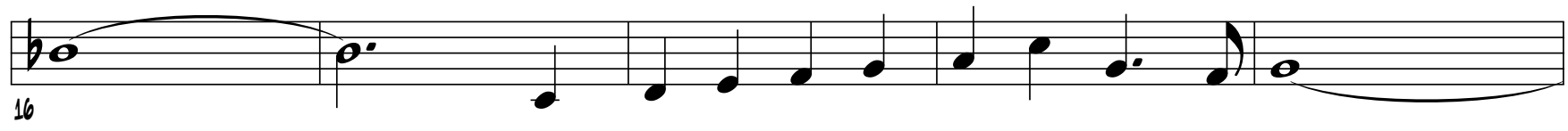
6

Eb7(#11) F Dmin7 G7(#11)



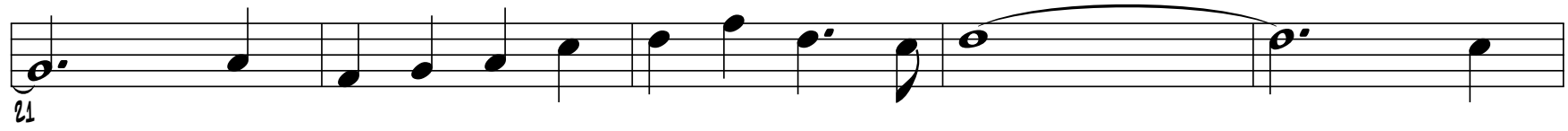
11

Gmin7 C7 F Em7(b5)



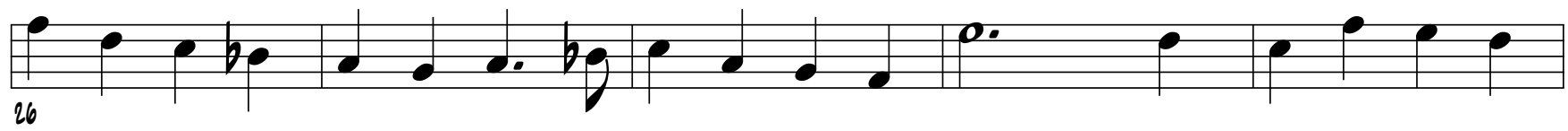
16

A7b9 Dmin7 Cmin7 F7



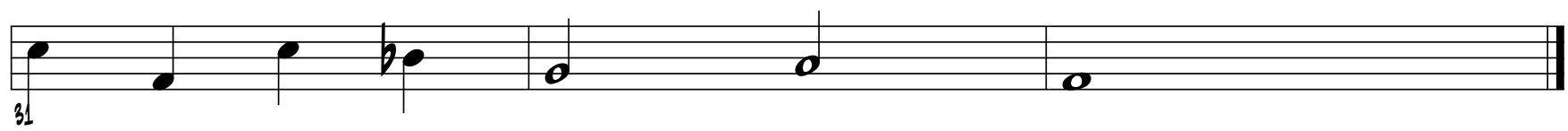
21

Bb Eb7(#11) F Bmin7 E7 F Bb7(#11)



26

Amin7 D7 Gmin7 C7 F



31

EWE

B FLAT

TRANSCRIBED BY CHRIS NORDELLO

FMAJ7 EM7(b5) A7b9 DMIN7

CMIN7 F7 BbMAJ7 Eb7#11

FMAJ7 DMIN7 G7#11 GMIN7

C7 FMAJ7 EM7(b5) A7b9

DMIN7 CMIN7 F7 BbMAJ7

Eb7#11 FMAJ7 BMIN7 E7 FMAJ7 E7 AMIN7 D7b9

GMIN7 C7 FMAJ7 EM7(b5)

A7b9 Dmin7 Cmin7 F7

36

Bbmaj7 Eb7#11 Fmaj7 Dmin7 G7#11

41

3

Gmin7 C7 Fmaj7

46

3 3

Em7(b5) A7b9 Dmin7 Cmin7

51

F7 Bbmaj7 Eb7#11 Fmaj7 Bmin7 E7

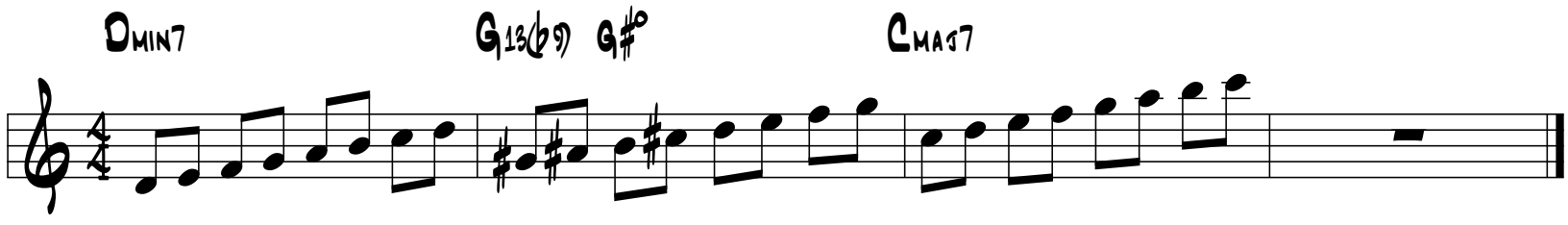
56

Fmaj7 E7 Amin7 D7b9 Gmin7 C7 Fmaj7

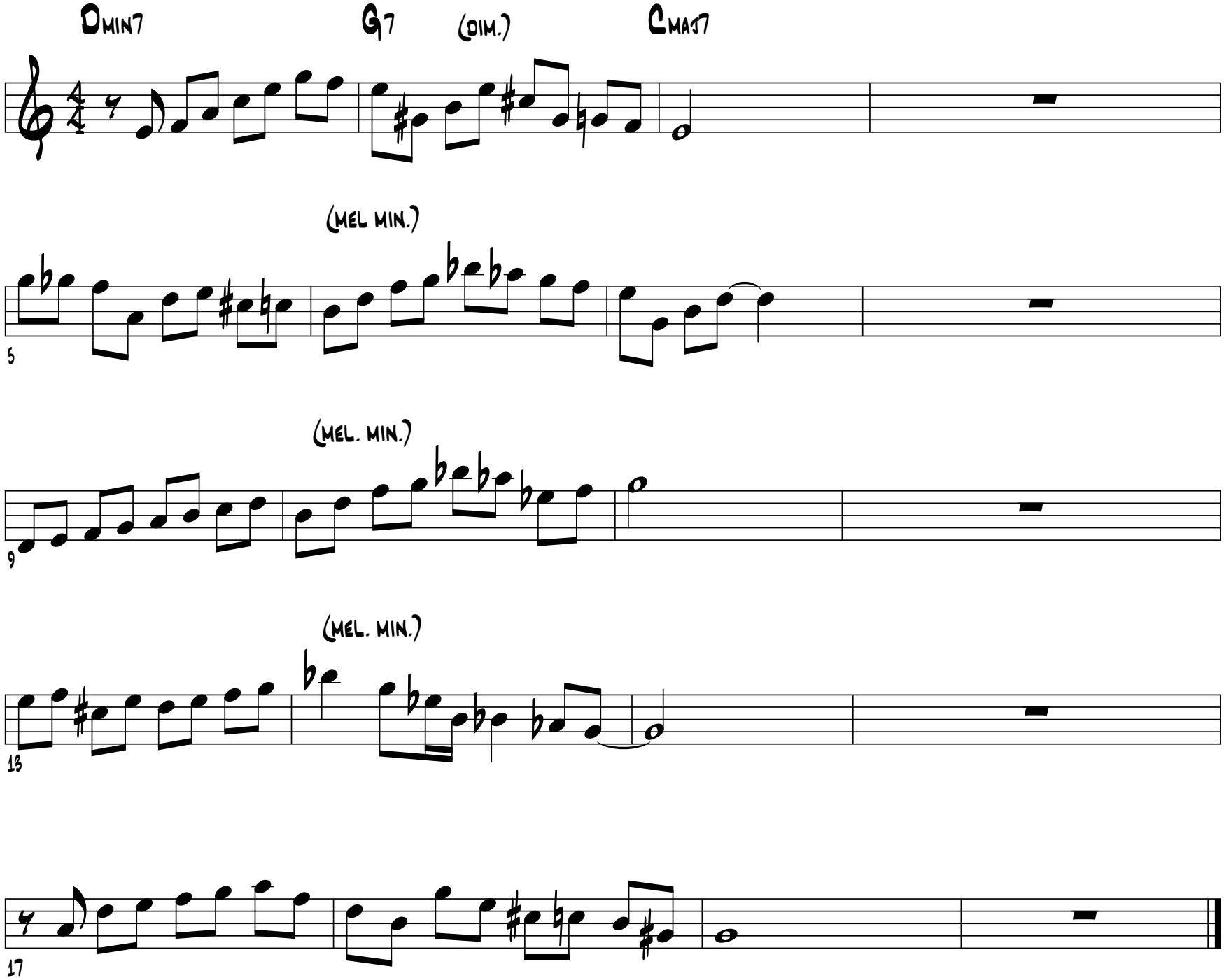
61

Altering the V7 Chord with Diminish Scale

Altering V chord with diminished scale



II V I's



Dolphin Dance

B Flat

Hancock

Fmaj7 C7sus4 Fmaj7 Emin7(b5) A7alt.

Dmin7 B♭7(#11) Dmin7 Bmin7 E7 Amaj7

5

B♭min7 E♭7 A♭maj7 Gmin7 C7 Fmaj7 Dmin7 Bmin7 E7

10

Amaj7 A7sus4 B/A A7sus4 G7sus4 G7(#11) G7sus4

17

F♯min7 B7 F7(#11) Bmin7 E7 C♯min7 F♯7 Emin7

24

D♯min7 G♯7 C♯min7 Bmin7/C♯ C♯min7 Bmin7/C♯

29

F7sus4 C7(b9) C7sus4 Emin7(b5) A7alt.

35

Rhythm Changes

Tenor Conclave

B flat

Mobley

C D-7 G7(#5) C D-7 G7

C D-7 G7 C7 F6 F#°

C A7 D-7 G7 C A7♭13 D-9 G7

E-7 A7♭9 D-7 G7#5 G-7 C7 F F-

CMAJ7 B-7 E7

E-7 A7 A7 D7

D-7 G7 C D-7 G7

C A7 D-7 G7 C7 F F-

29

C C D-7 G7#5

33

C A7b9 D7 G7 C7 F F-

37

E- Eb- D-7 G7ALT. C D-7 G7

41

E-7 D-7 G7ALT. G-7 C7 F F-7

45

C B-7 E7ALT.

49

E-7 A7 A-7 D7

53

G7 C

57

61 C7 F F-7

65 C C D-7 G7

69 C A7 D-7 G7b9 C7 F-

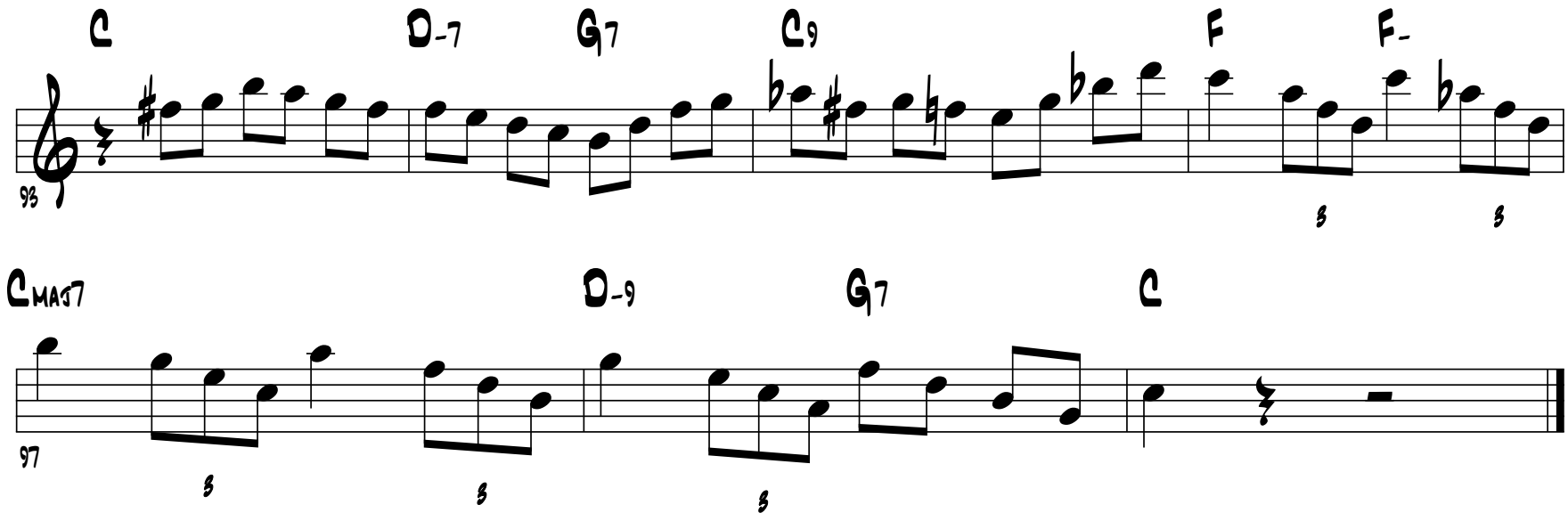
73 C D-7 G7b9 C D-7 G7

77 C A7 D-7 G7 C7 F F-

81 C B-7 E7

85 E-7 A7 D7 D7

89 D-7 DbMAJ C D-7 G7

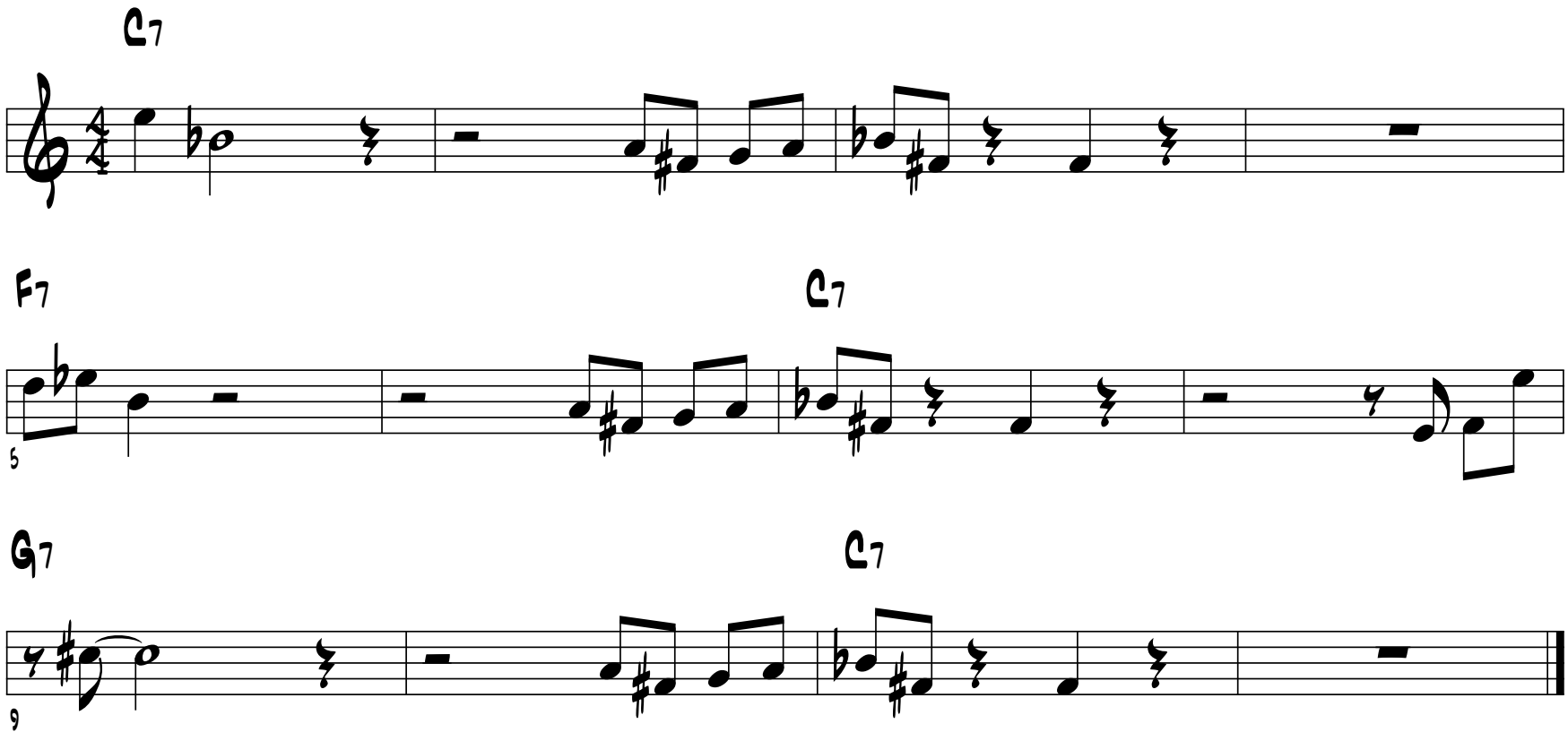

C
D-7
G7
C9
F
F-
93
CMAJ7
D-9
G7
C
97

Lydian Dominant

Blue Seven

B flat

Rollins



B FLAT

Blue Seven

ROLLINS

C7

F7 C7 G7

6

D-7 G7 C7 D-7 G7

11

C7 F7 C7 F7 C7

14

G7 F7 C7 D-7 G7

22

C7 F7 C7

26

F7 C7

30

D-7 G7 C7

34

D-7 G7 C7 F7 C7

38

F7

42

C7

46

G7 D-7 G7 C7 G7

48

C7 F7 C7

52

F7 C7

56

D-7 G7 C7 G7 C7

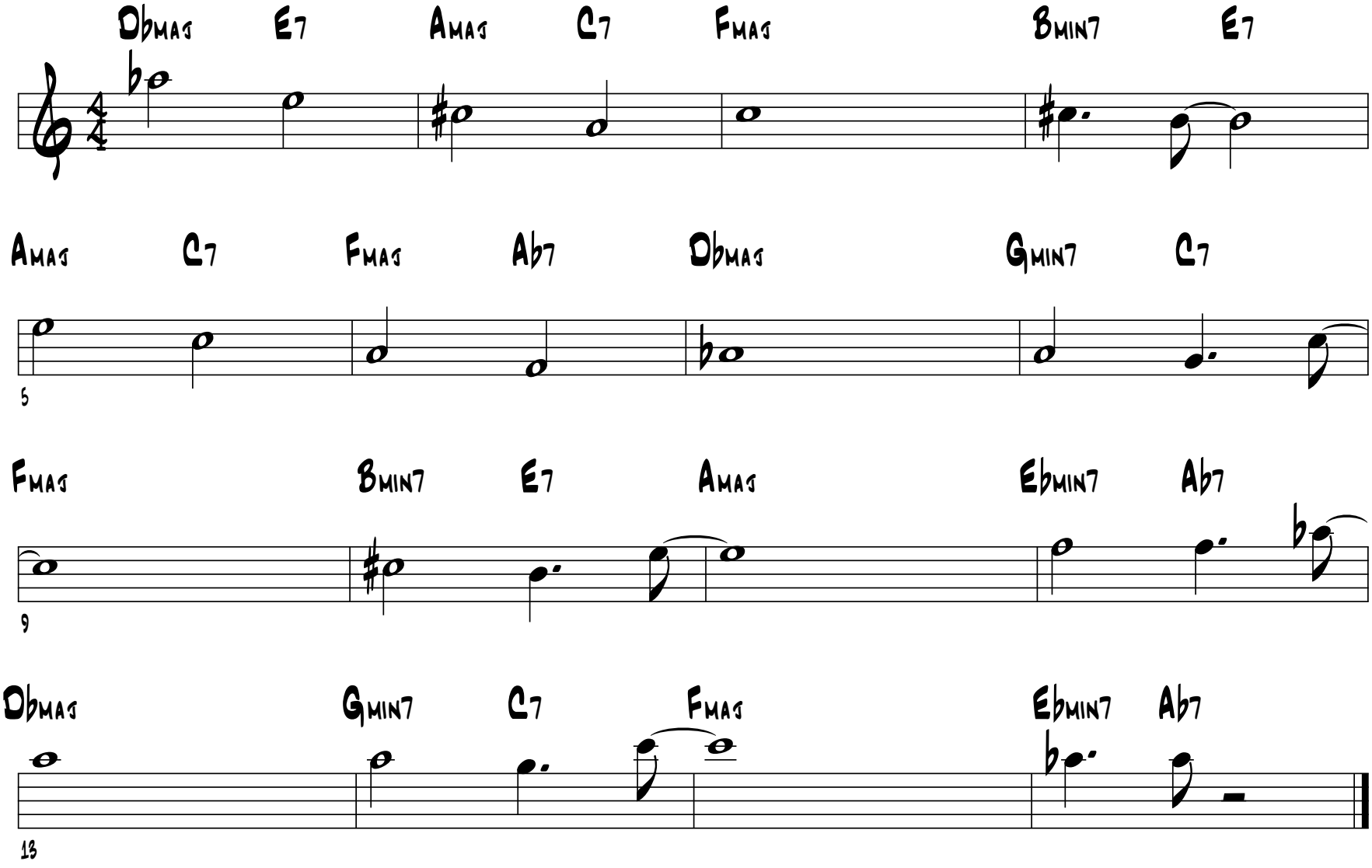
60

Giant Steps

Giant Steps

B FLAT

COLTRANE



B FLAT

GIANT STEPS

COLTRANE

Ebmin7 Ab7 Db E7 Amaj7 C7 Fmaj7

Bmin7 E7 Amaj C7 Fmaj Ab7 Dbmaj

5

Gmin7 C7 Fmaj Bmin7 E7 Amaj

9

Ebmin7 Ab7 Dbmaj Gmin7 C7 Fmaj Ebmin7 Ab7

13

Dbmaj E7 Amaj C7 Fmaj Bmin7 E7

18

Amaj C7 Fmaj Ab7 Dbmaj Gmin7 C7

22

Fmaj Bmin7 E7 Amaj Ebmin7 Ab7

26

Dbmaj Gmin7 C7 Fmaj Ebmin7 Ab7

30

3

Dbmaj E7 Amaj C7 Fmaj Bmin7 E7

34

Amaj C7 Fmaj Ab7 Dbmaj Gmin7 C7

38

Fmaj Bmin7 E7 Amaj Ebmin7 Ab7

42

Dbmaj Gmin7 C7 Fmaj Ebmin7 Ab7

46

Dbmaj7 E7 Amaj C7 Fmaj Bmin7 E7

50

Amaj C7 Fmaj Dbmaj Gmin7 C7 Fmaj Bmin7 E7

54

Amaj Ebmin7 Ab7 Dbmaj Gmin7 C7 Fmaj

60

3

3

Credits:

I would like to thank Dr. Brian Leavell and Professor Gary Campbell.