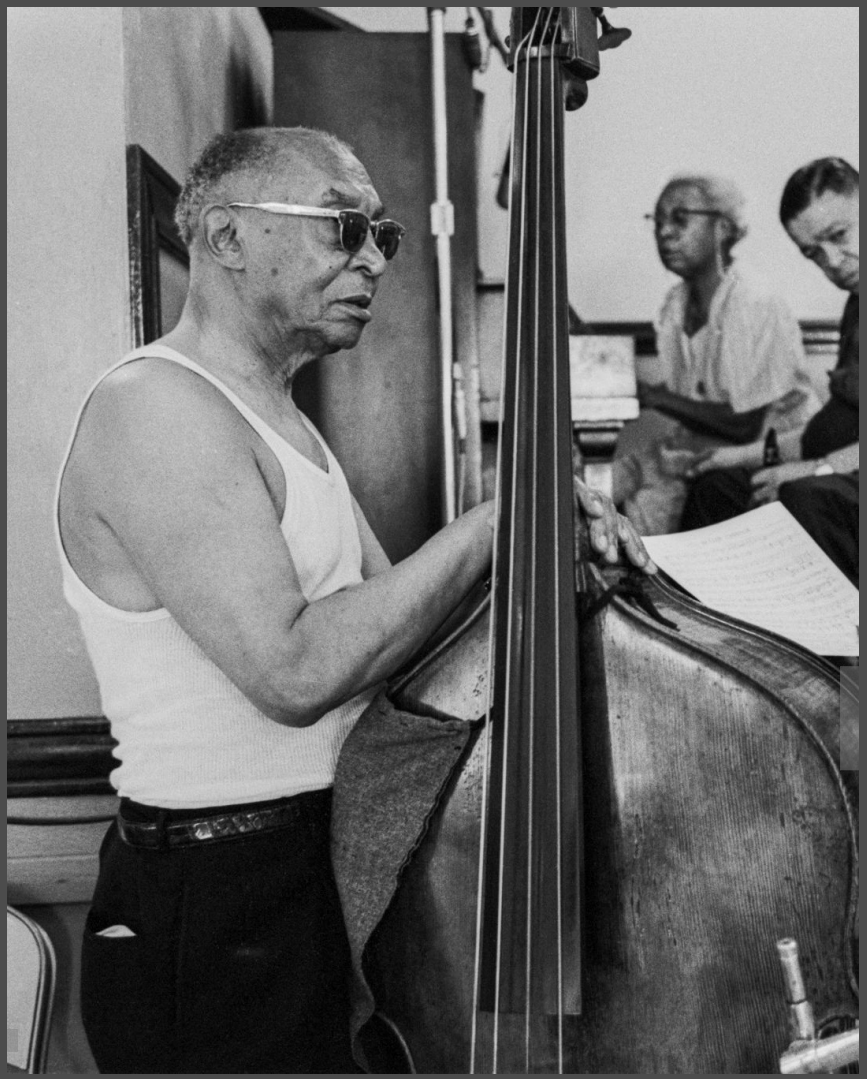
M I L W A U K E E J A Z Z I N S T I T U T E

BUILDING BETTER BASS SOLOS



George 'Pops' Foster (1892 – 1969); an early innovator in jazz bass. Foster pioneered a percussive ‘slap’ style of playing which allowed the bass to be heard clearly over the band. Here at a rehearsal for Alberta Hunter in Chicago, September 1, 1961.

by Clay Schaub, Dec 3rd, 2020

Ray Brown with Christian McBride

"…The double bass possesses inherent limitations that are formidable obstacles to jazz improvisation: the pizzicato sound is most penetrating in the lowest register, where the semitones are spaced furthest apart, while the upper registers, where the pitches are closer together, lack resonance. The arco sound is easier to hear but contains numerous powerful overtones and extraneous noises caused by the action of the bow on the strings. In addition, amplification and recording technologies {are} only partially effective in capturing the instrument's volume and timbre, even in controlled situations. The double bassist is thus limited in the types of patterns that are playable and that will satisfy critical standards of clarity, accuracy of intonation, and musical expression under diverse circumstances."

From:
The Solo Vocabulary of Jazz Bassist Jimmie Blanton
by Robert Nash, 1999, page 39
Louisiana State University and Agricultural College

Here's Ray Brown's lovely
Solo For Unaccompanied Bass

From Ray's first album as a leader 'BASS HIT!'
Recorded on November 21st & 23rd, 1956
For Verve Records

The challenges of soloing on the bass can be made workable, if we practice...

...And especially if we practice tunes:

50 Jazz Standards You Should Know

(From learnjazzstandards.com)

1 All of Me
2 All The Things You Are
3 Alone Together
4 Autumn Leaves
5 Billie's Bounce
6 Black Orpheus
7 Blue Bossa
8 Body and Soul
9 But Not For Me
10 Bye Bye Blackbird
11 Cherokee
12 Confirmation
13 Days of Wine and Roses
14 Doxy
15 Fly Me To The Moon
16 Footprints
17 Four
18 Have You Met Miss Jones
19 How High The Moon
20 I Hear a Rhapsody
21 I Love You
22 I Remember You
23 I'll Remember April
24 I'm Old Fashioned
25 If I Should Lose You
26 If I Were A Bell
27 In A Mellow Tone
28 In A Sentimental Mood
29 It Could Happen To You
30 Just Friends
31 Misty
32 My Funny Valentine
33 Night and Day
34 Oleo
35 On Green Dolphin Street
36 Recorda Me
37 Satin Doll
38 Stella By Starlight
39 Scrapple From The Apple
40 So What
41 Solar
42 St. Thomas
43 Sweet Georgia Brown
44 Take The A Train
45 The Girl From Ipanema
46 There Is No Greater Love
47 There Will Never Be Another You
48 Up Jumped Spring
49 What Is This Thing Called Love
50 Yesterdays

Ten Steps To Know A Tune

(Adapted from the teaching of Neal Miner)

1. **Listen** – many versions, many times

2. **Memorize the lyric and bass notes** – sing the melody and play roots on the bass

3. **Memorize and play the original melody** – Learn it from published sheet music, or if the sheet music is unavailable, use a very early recording. Original vocal versions are usually much closer to the composed melody than improvised instrumental interpretations (#9).

4. **Memorize the changes** – be able to recite them orally, be very specific. Play all scales, 7-3 resolutions, etc. Once solid, become familiar with various other common routings.

5. **Compose or Transcribe bass lines** – a line in 2 & a line in 4, written/played from memory.

6. **Compose a solo** – compose from memory and use specific concepts. For example: melody; space; rhythm; bebop; horizontal structures; etc.

7. **Transcribe** – commit to memory at least one chorus of a solo you love

8. **Play the tune in other keys**

9. **Compose a contrafact** – write your own line/tune over the changes

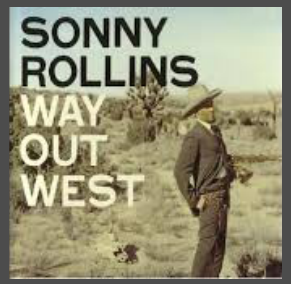
10. **Now play the melody with your own embellishments**

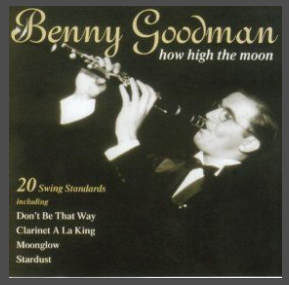
1. Listen – many versions, many times

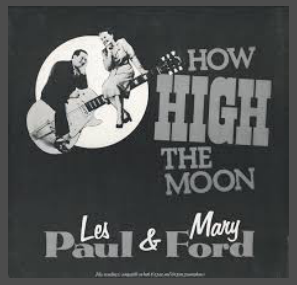
How High The Moon

(By Morgan Lewis, Lyrics by Nancy Hamilton)

The musical revue "Two for The Show" featured music by Morgan Lewis with sketches and lyrics by Nancy Hamilton. The most notable song in the show was 'How High The Moon.' The revue opened on Broadway at the Booth Theatre on February 8th, 1940 and closed on May 25, 1940 after 124 performances. 'How High The Moon' however, has been performed and recorded countless times by jazz and pop artists, becoming a 'towering song,' a jazz standard. It was recorded first by Benny Goodman on February 7th, 1940 with Helen Forrest on vocals. Other notable versions include performances by: Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, Chet Baker, Sonny Stitt, Oscar Peterson, Coleman Hawkins, Django Reinhardt, & Les Paul and Mary Ford (the first song ever to use multi-tracked vocals).

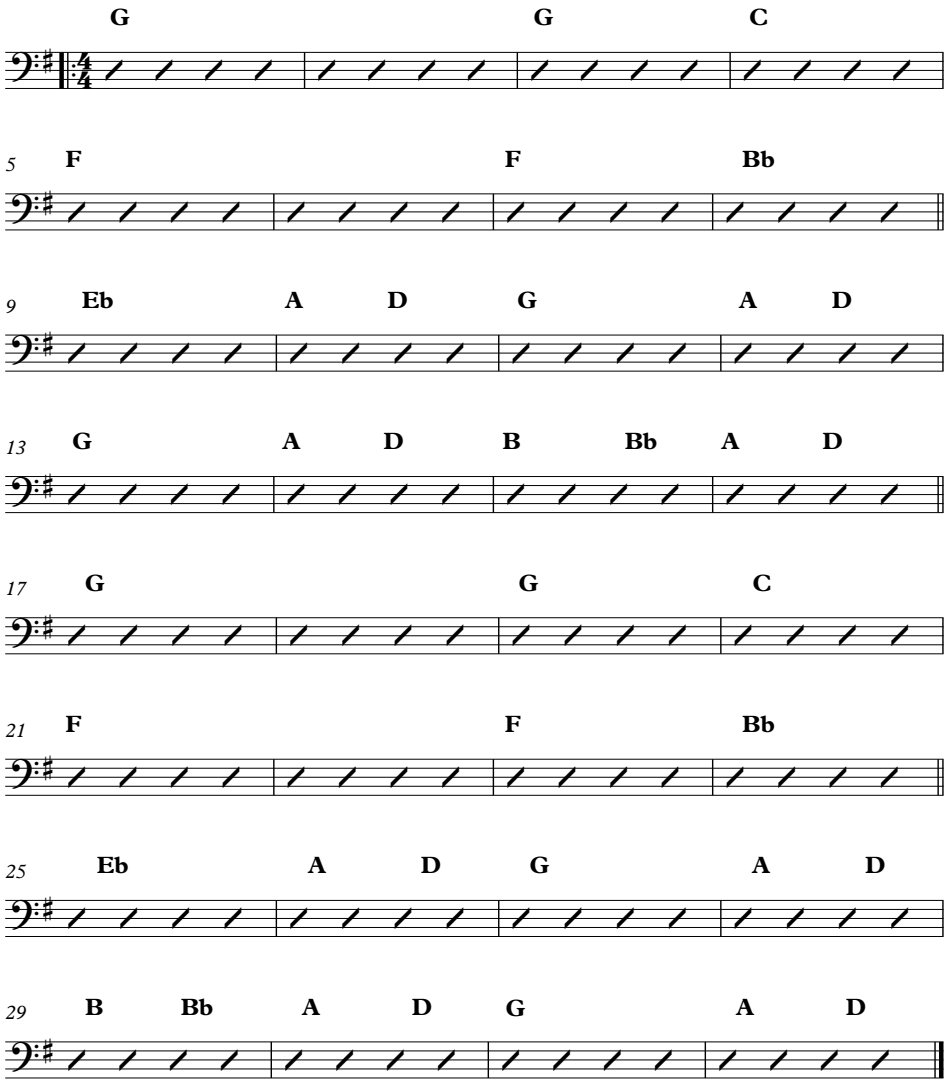






How High The Moon
(roots only)

Nancy Hamilton — Morgan Lewis



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2. Memorize the lyric

Somewhere there's music.
How faint the tune?
Somewhere there's heaven-
How high the moon?

There is no moon above
When love is far away too.
'Til it comes true
That you love me as I love you.

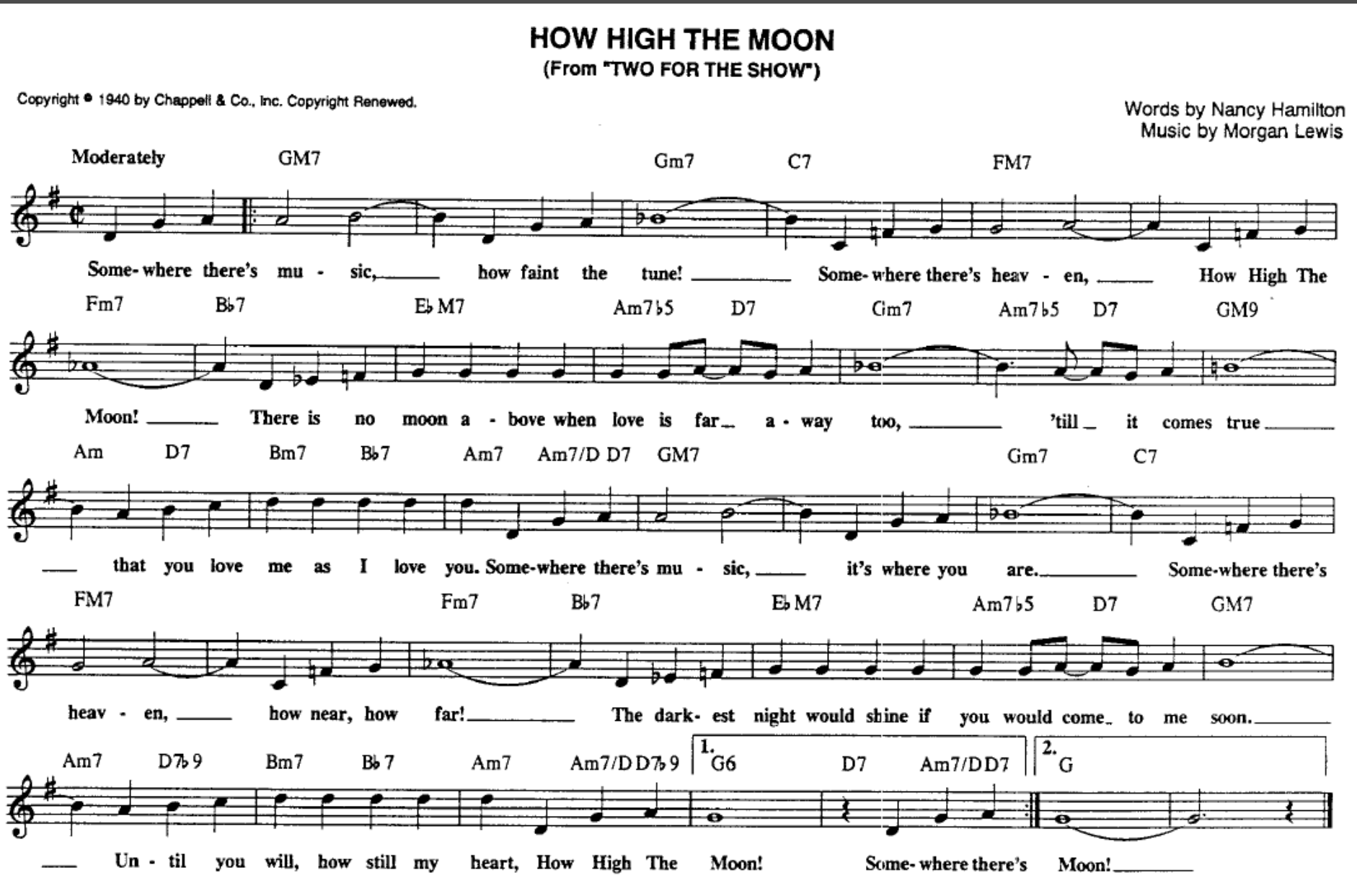
Somewhere there's music
It's where you are.
Somewhere there's heaven-
How near, how far?

The darkest night would shine
If you would come to me soon.
Until you will- how still my heart?
How high the moon?

...And the roots

...Now sing the melody and play the roots together.

3. Memorize and play the *original melody* from published sheet music or very early recording



HOW HIGH THE MOON
(From "TWO FOR THE SHOW")

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Words by Nancy Hamilton
Music by Morgan Lewis

Moderately

GM7 Gm7 C7 FM7

Some- where there's mu - sic, how faint the tune! Some- where there's heav - en, How High The

Fm7 B♭7 E♭M7 Am7♭5 D7 Gm7 Am7♭5 D7 GM9

Moon! There is no moon a - bove when love is far a - way too, 'till it comes true

Am D7 Bm7 B♭7 Am7 Am7/D D7 GM7 Gm7 C7

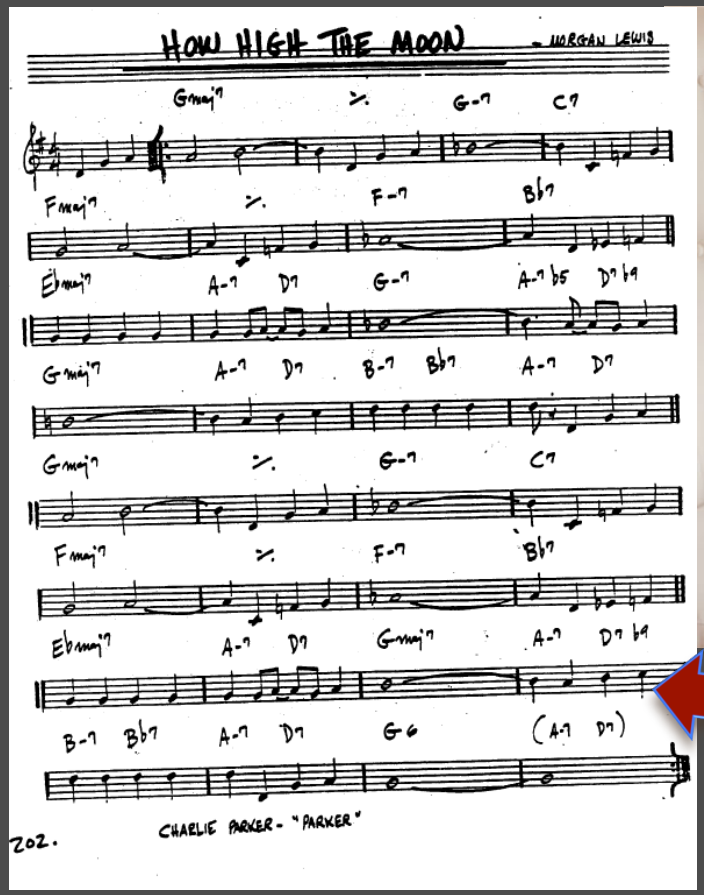
that you love me as I love you. Some-where there's mu - sic, it's where you are. Some-where there's

FM7 Fm7 B♭7 E♭M7 Am7♭5 D7 GM7

heav - en, how near, how far! The dark- est night would shine if you would come to me soon.

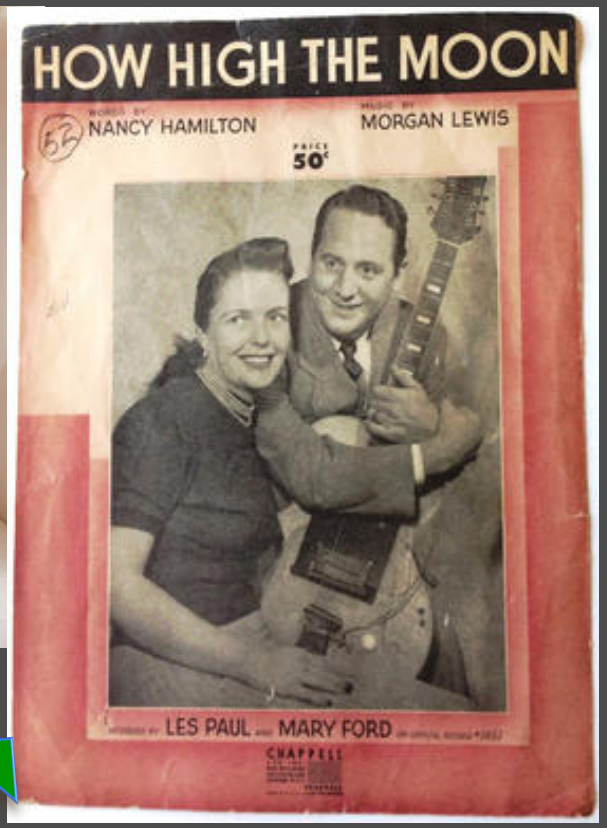
Am7 D7♭9 Bm7 B♭7 Am7 Am7/D D7♭9 1. G6 D7 Am7/D D7 2. G

Un - til you will, how still my heart, How High The Moon! Some- where there's Moon!

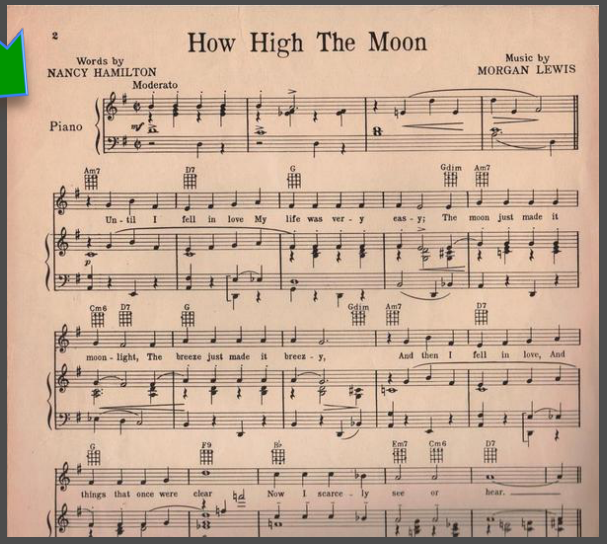


What To Do When There Are Gray Areas in Tunes

Use with Discretion!



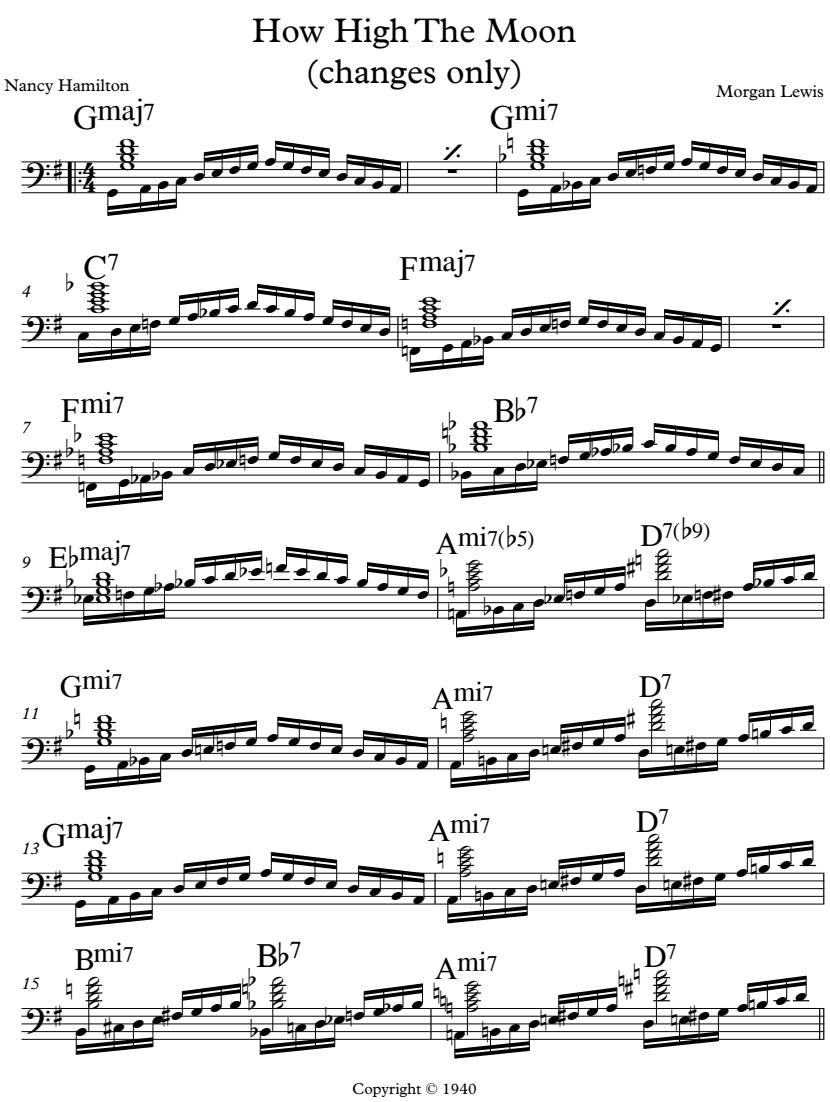
More difficult to find but **Very Helpful**!!

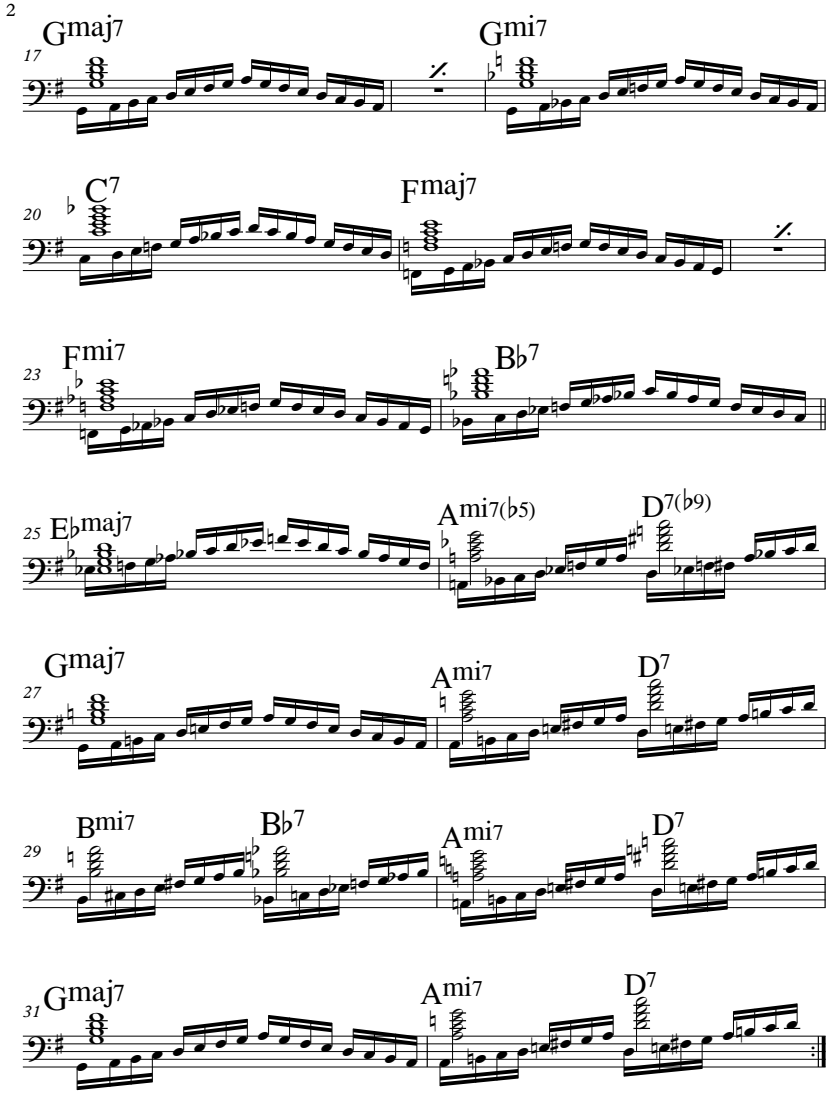


Realbooks (ones without the publisher marks) frequently contain mistakes and innacuracies. Try to use them with discretion - only to see what other people might play, not as *the gold standard* reference from which you should learn a tune. For really knowing what the composer intended the tune to be, and for learning a tune as accurately as possible, try to use published sheet music, or if that proves difficult to find, try very early recordings.

Also, listening closely to your fellow musicians, being flexible, and/or knowing them well enough to ocassionally ask, 'Hey what do you play here?' can avoid a lot these types of situations.

4. Memorize the changes – be able to recite them orally, be very specific. Play all scales, 7-3 resolutions, etc. Once solid, become familiar with various other common routings.

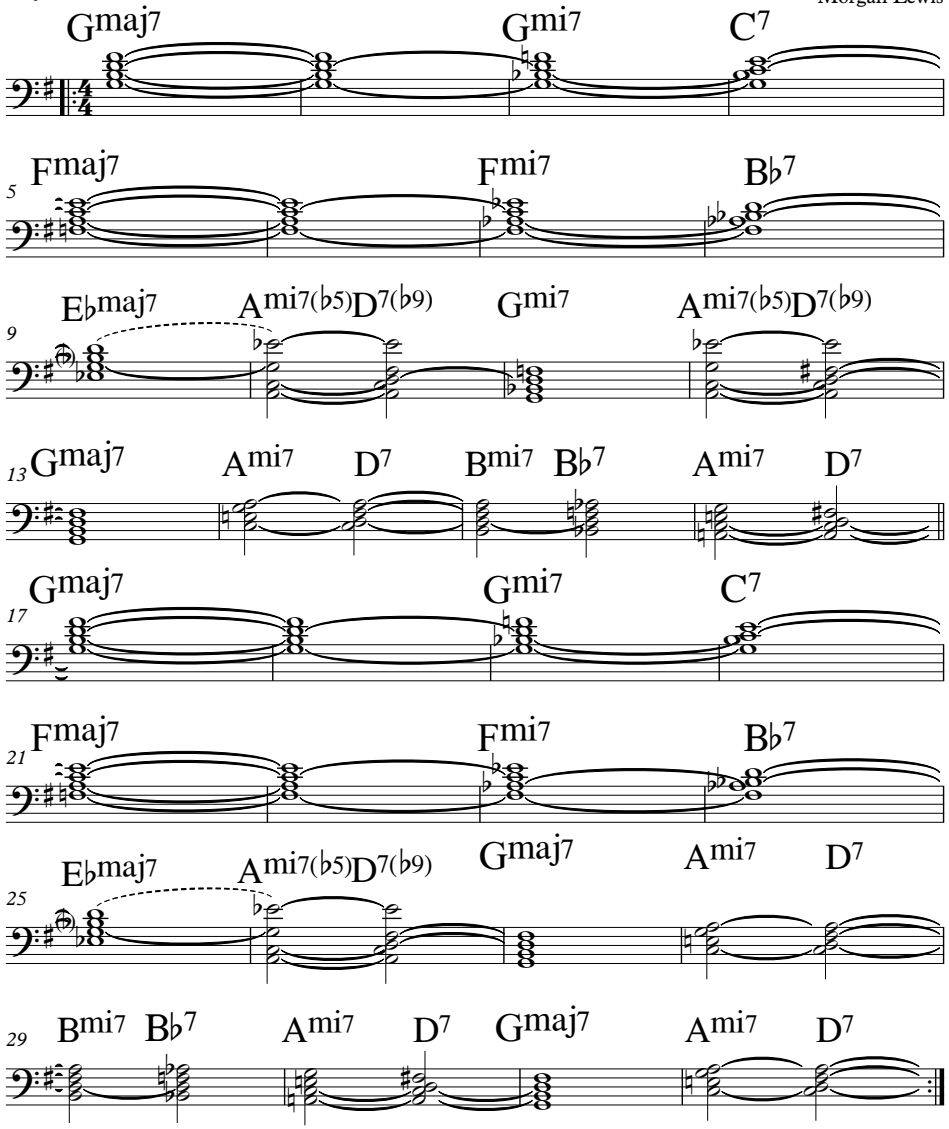




How High The Moon
(7-3 resolutions only)

Nancy Hamilton

Morgan Lewis



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A MOMENTARY PAUSE FOR…

Ray Brown with Oscar Peterson and Ed Thigpen

Ray Brown with Louis Jordan and Ella Fitzgerald

Ray Brown's Most Important Advice for Bass Players

"The most important thing you can do with this instrument is – Not play fast, Not play solos, but *get a good sound*. *Play in tune*. This is where you will get your job from… Learn how to play the bass in tune and get a good sound. That's the most important thing you can do. Now, I'm telling you from an experience. I've worked with ALL of the singers… I've played with ALL the saxophone players… They will pay you for it good! And you will work the rest of your life. I guarantee it."

From the video "Ray Brown Presents: The Art of Playing the Bass, Part 1"

5. Compose or Transcribe Bass Lines – a chorus in 2 & a chorus in 4, written and/or played from memory.

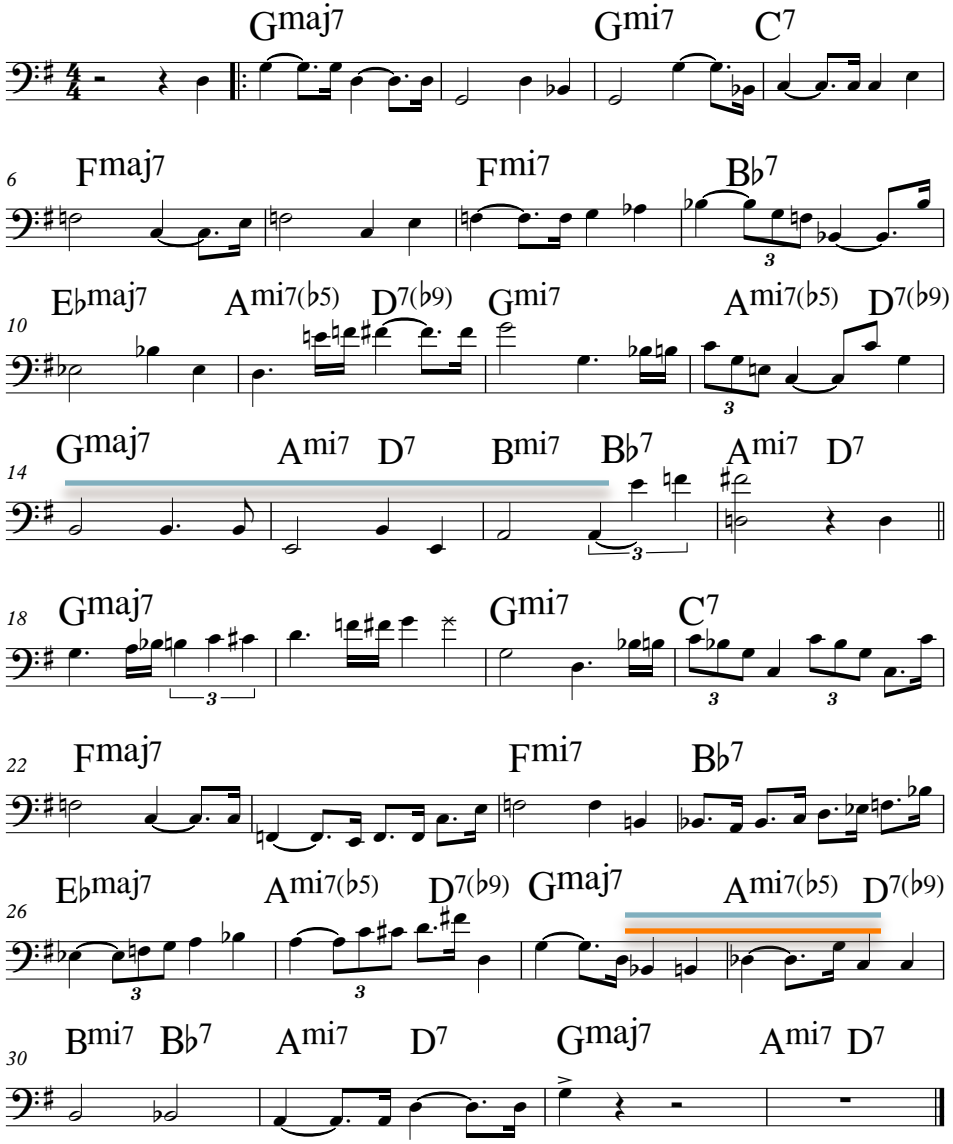
[‘CHET’]

Chet Baker –tpt.
Pepper Adams – bari.
Herbie Mann – fl.
Paul Chambers – bs.
Bill Evans – pno.
Kenny Burrell – gtr.
Connie Kay – dr.

How High The Moon

(Bassline in 2 - Paul Chambers, from Chet Baker's 1959 album 'Chet')

Nancy Hamilton — Morgan Lewis



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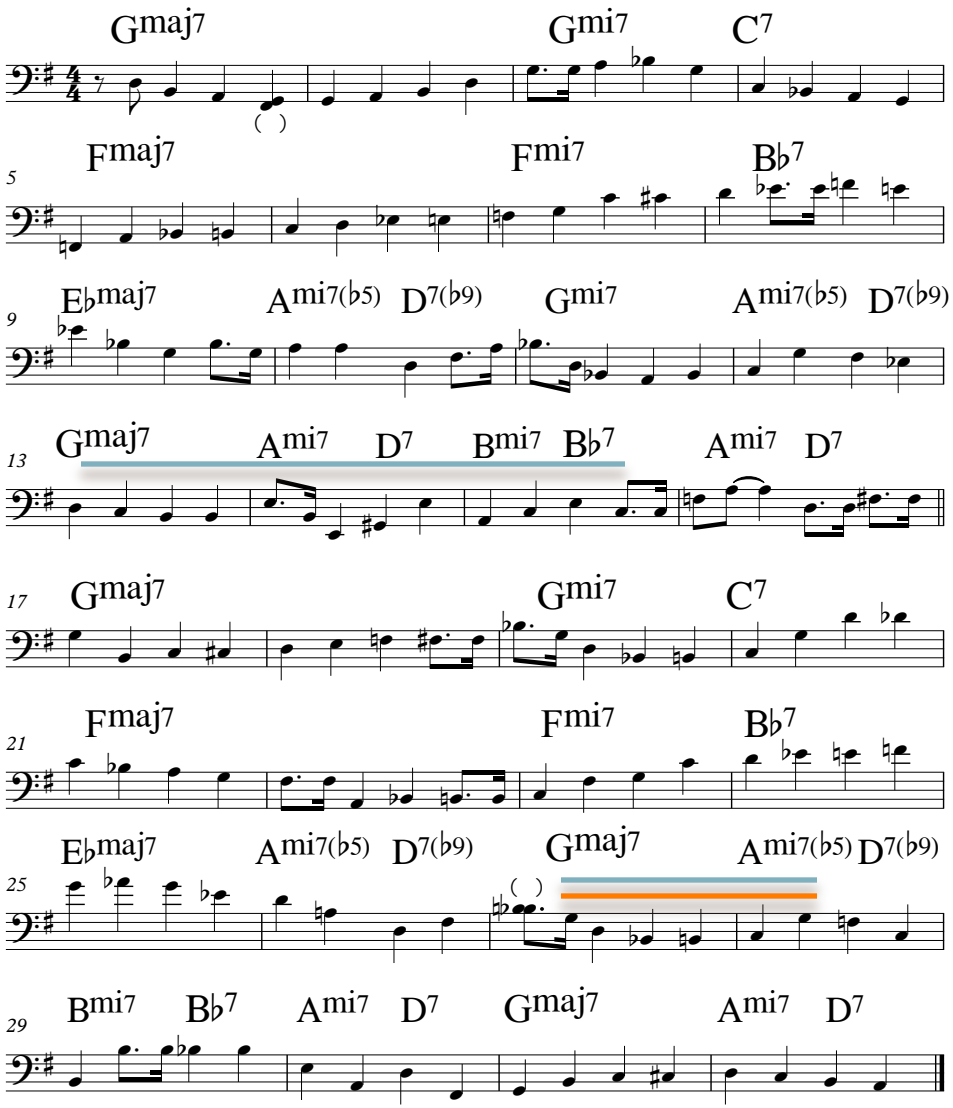
How High The Moon

(Bassline in 4 - Paul Chambers, from Chet Baker's 1959 album 'Chet')

Nancy Hamilton — Morgan Lewis



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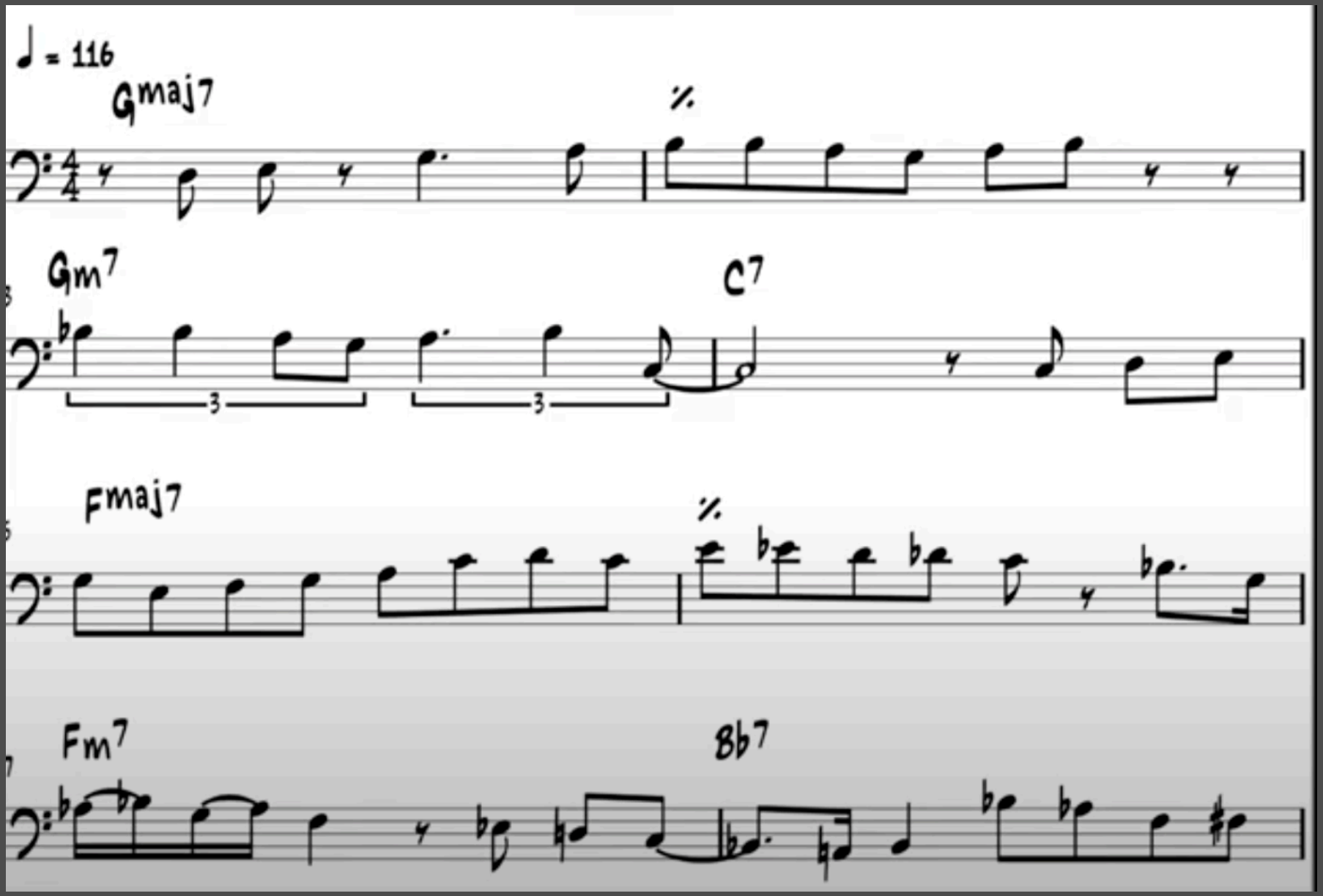
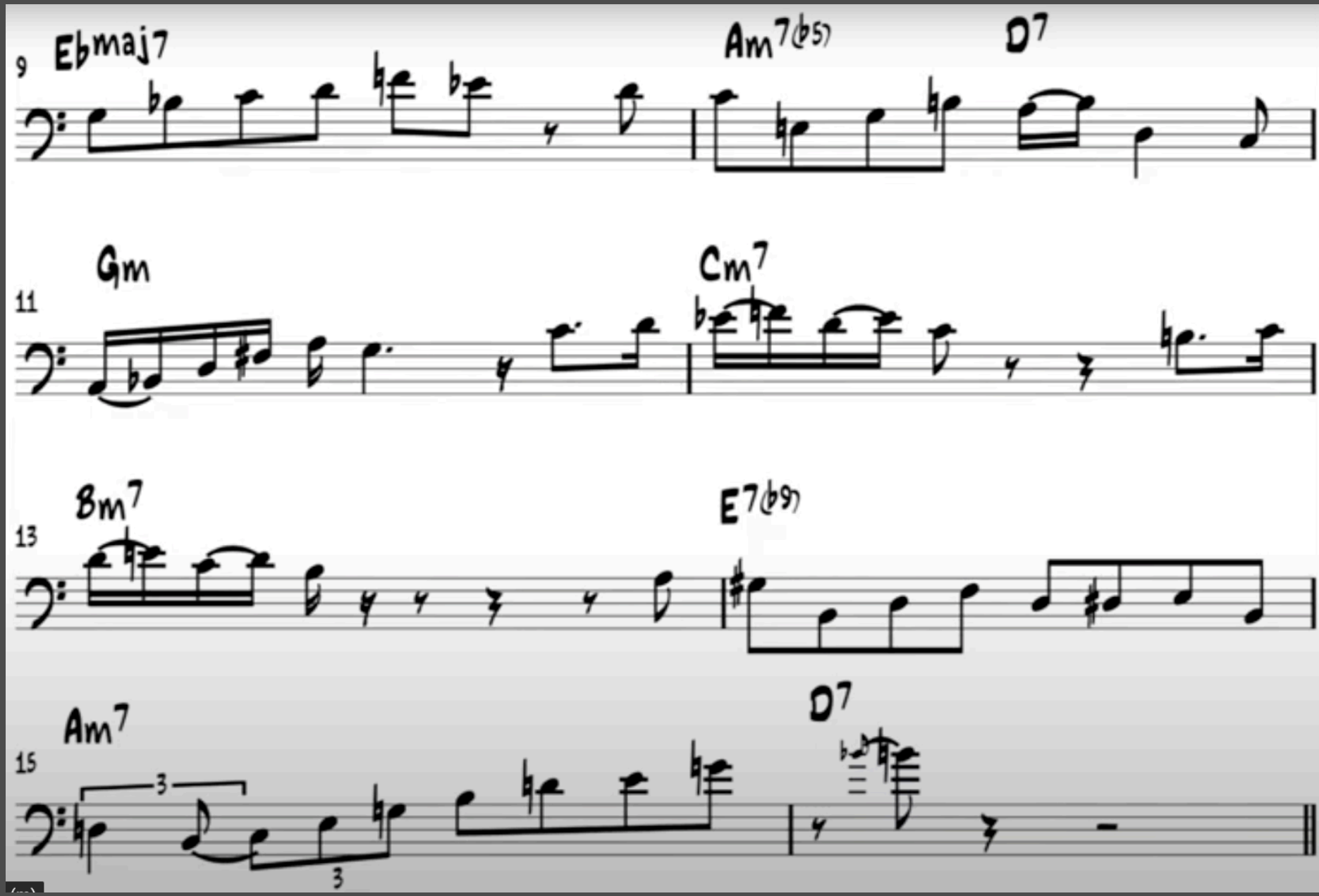
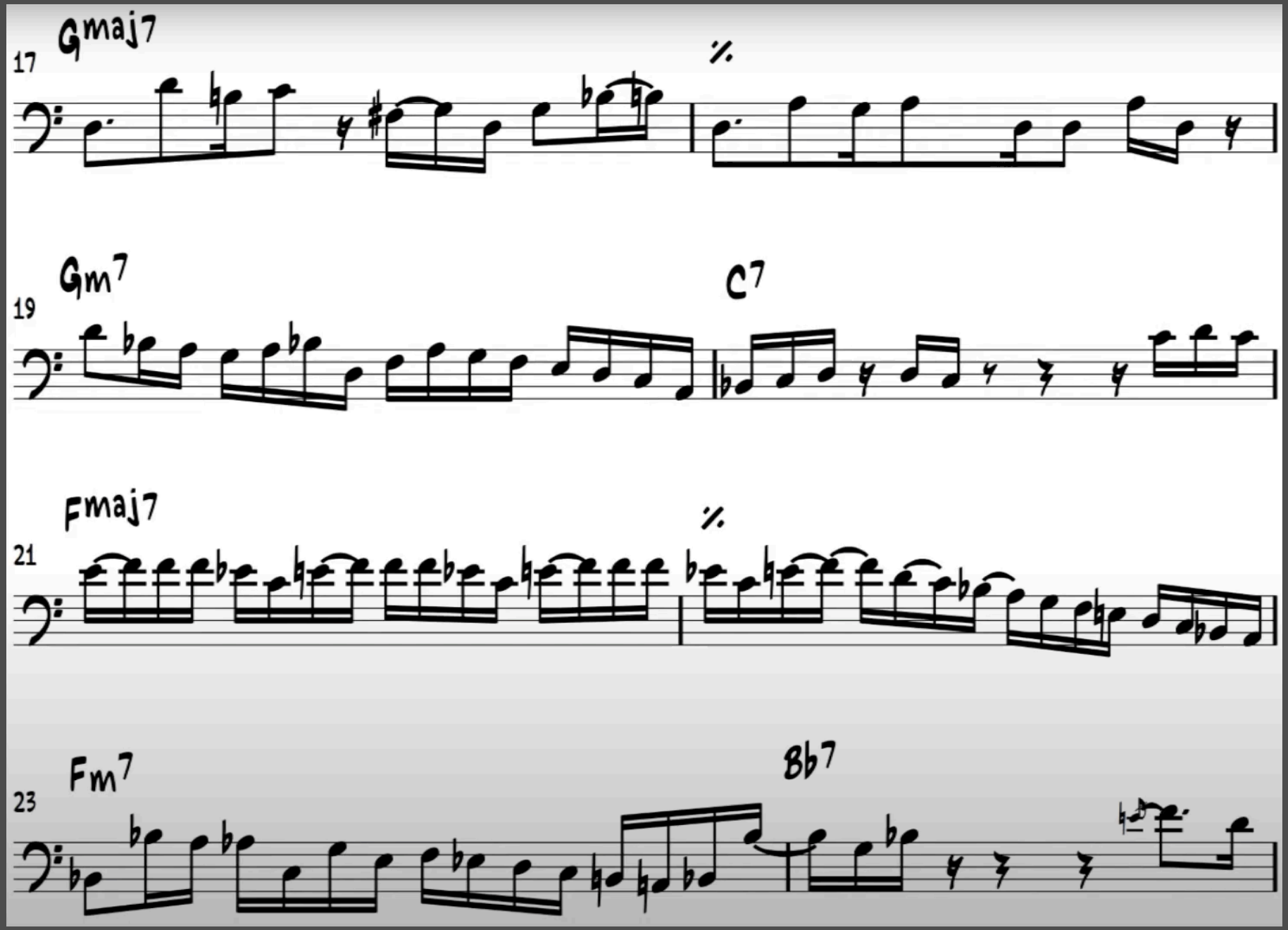
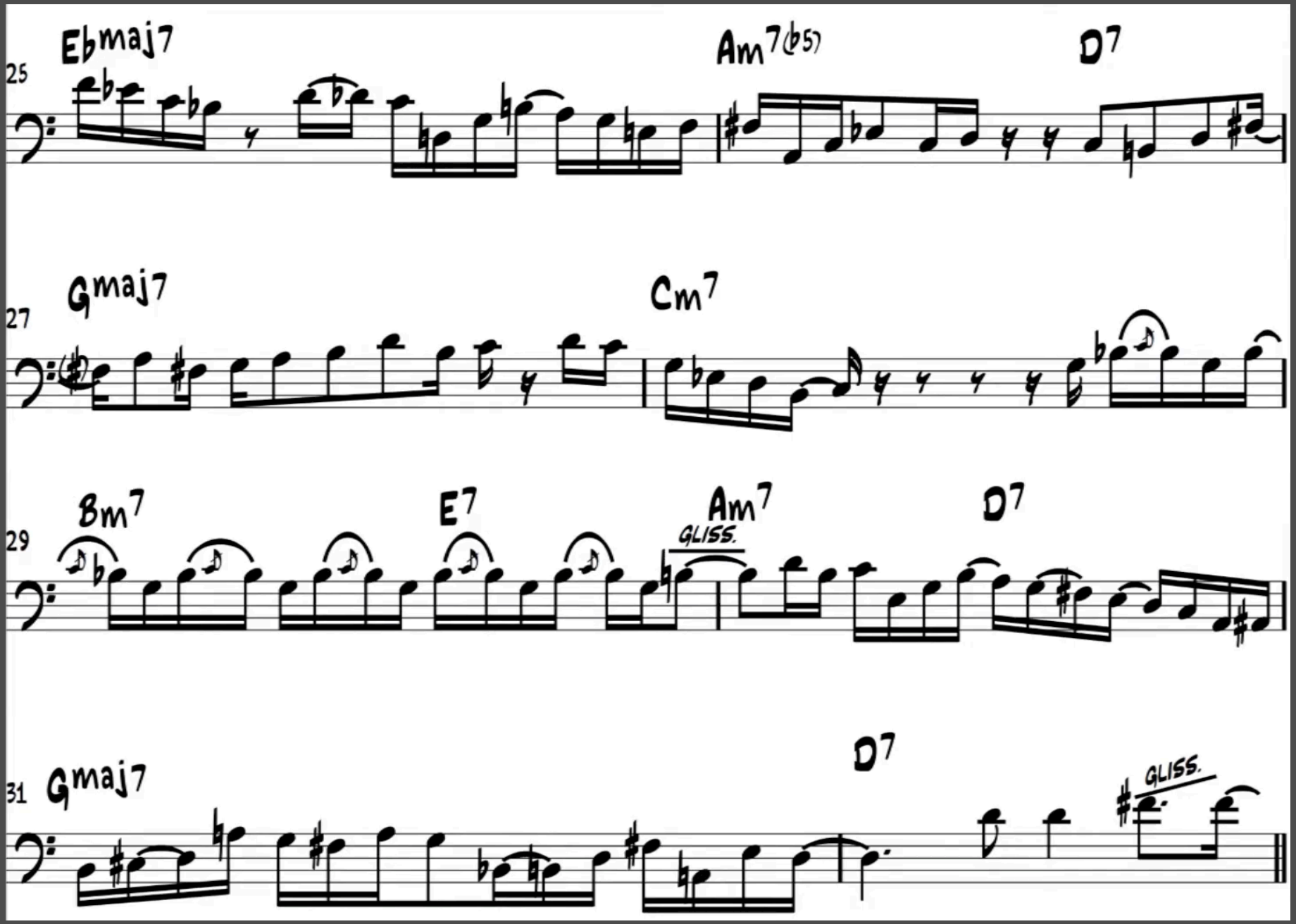
6. **Transcribe** – commit to memory at least one chorus of a solo you love

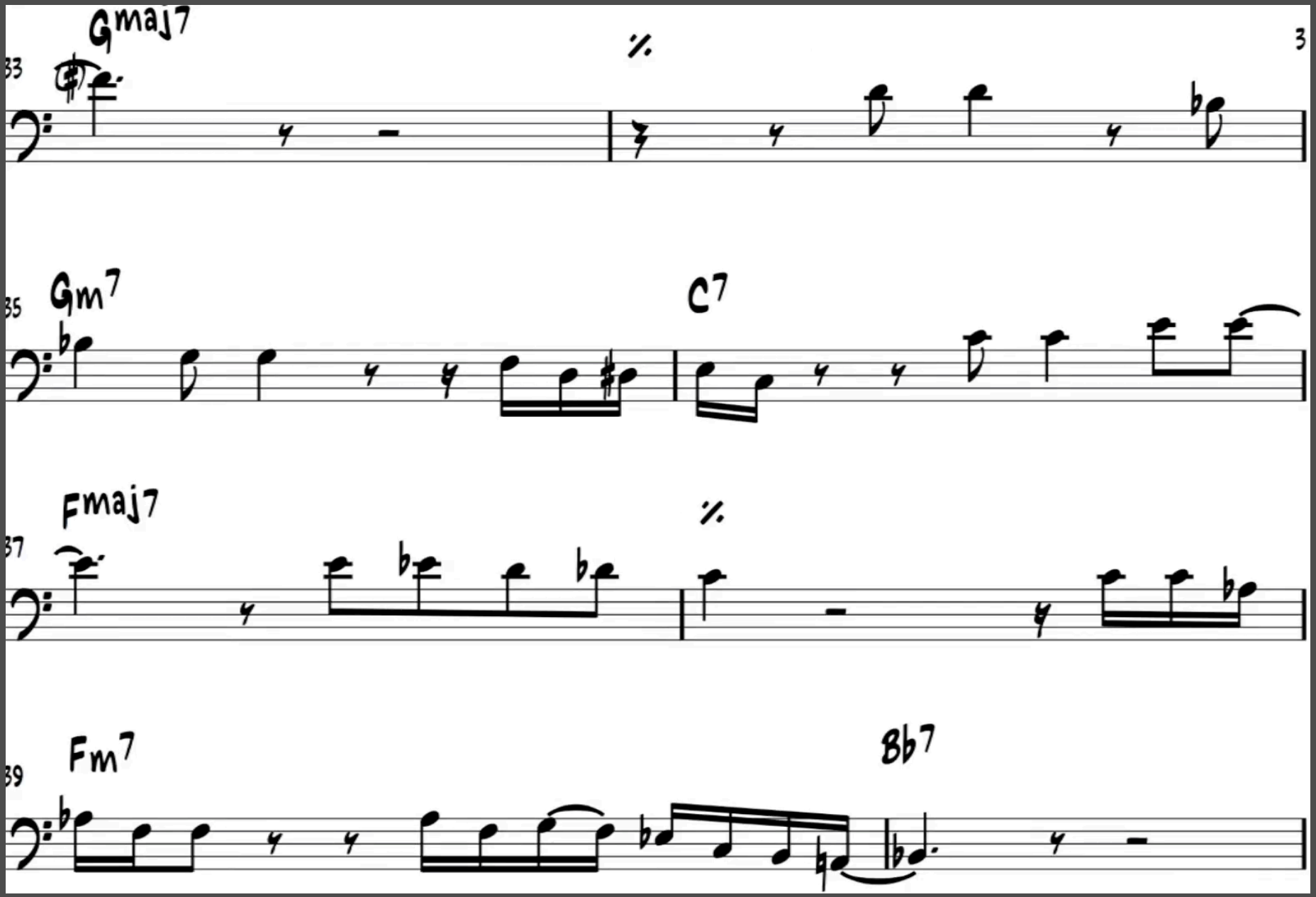
Ray Brown on 'How High The Moon' - Oscar Peterson at The Stratford Shakepearean Festival, 1956, Oscar Peterson (pno), Herb Ellis (gtr), Ray Brown (bs); pg 1

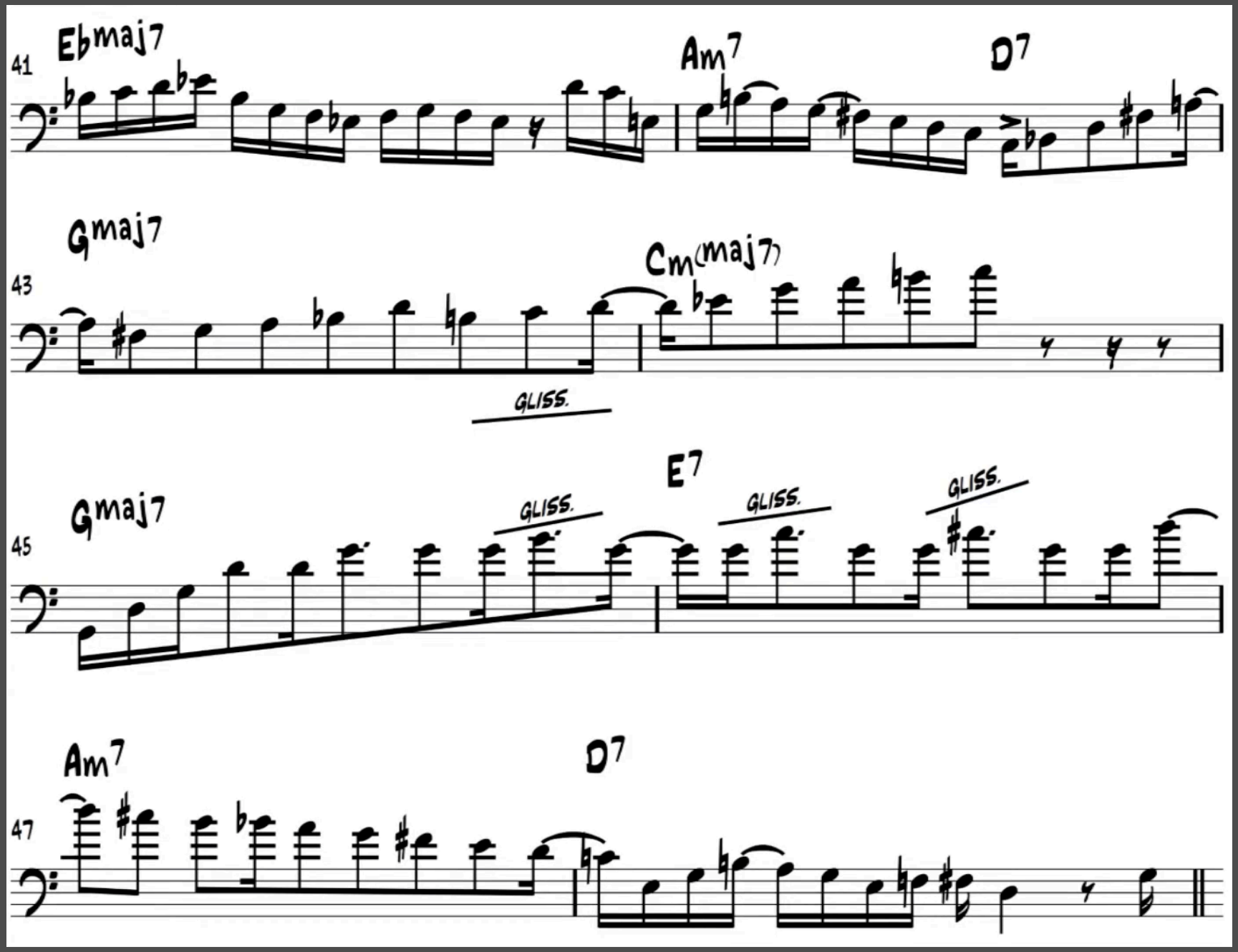


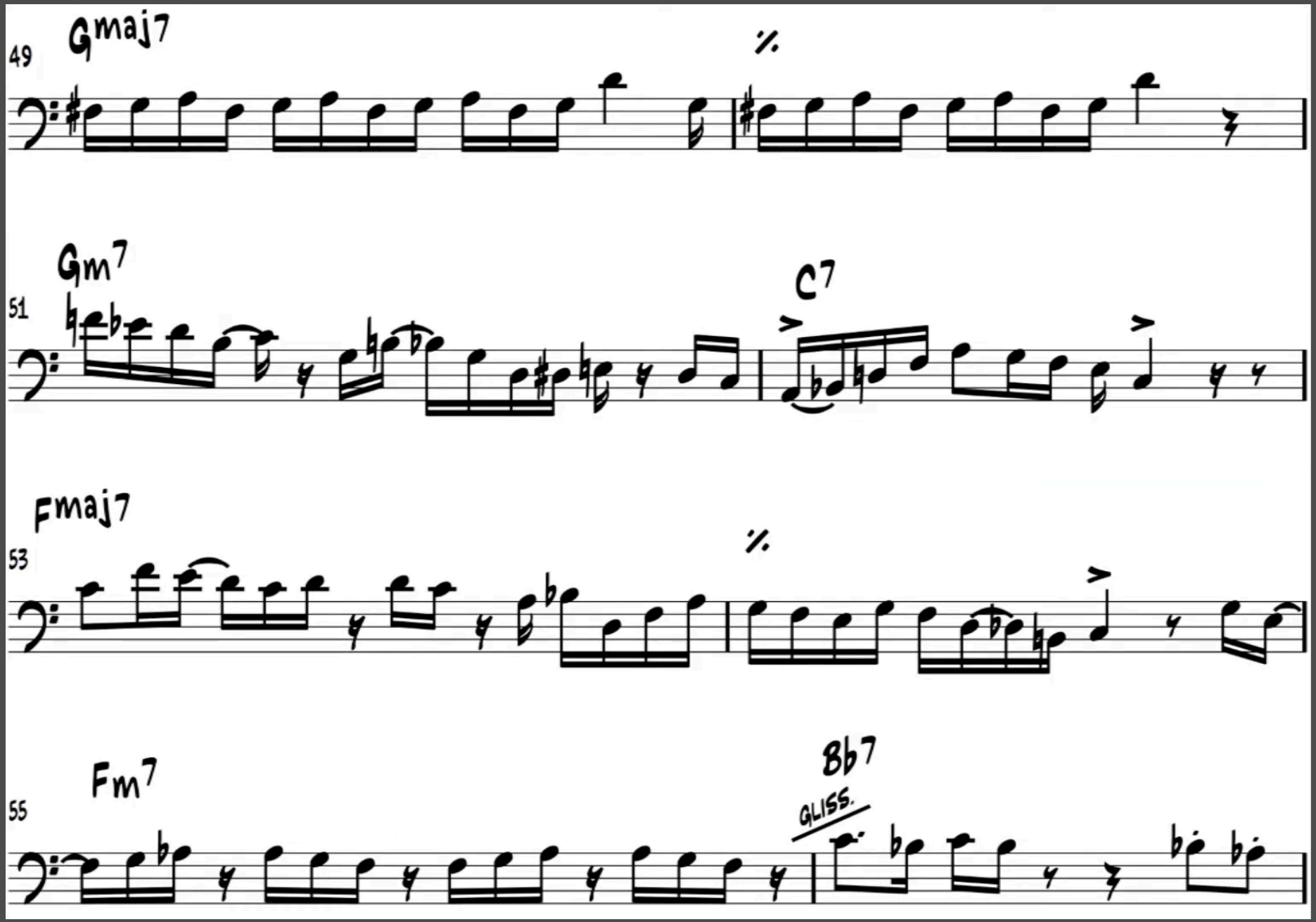

9
Ebmaj7
Am7(b5)
D7
11
Gm
Cm7
13
Bm7
E7(b9)
15
Am7
D7
3
3

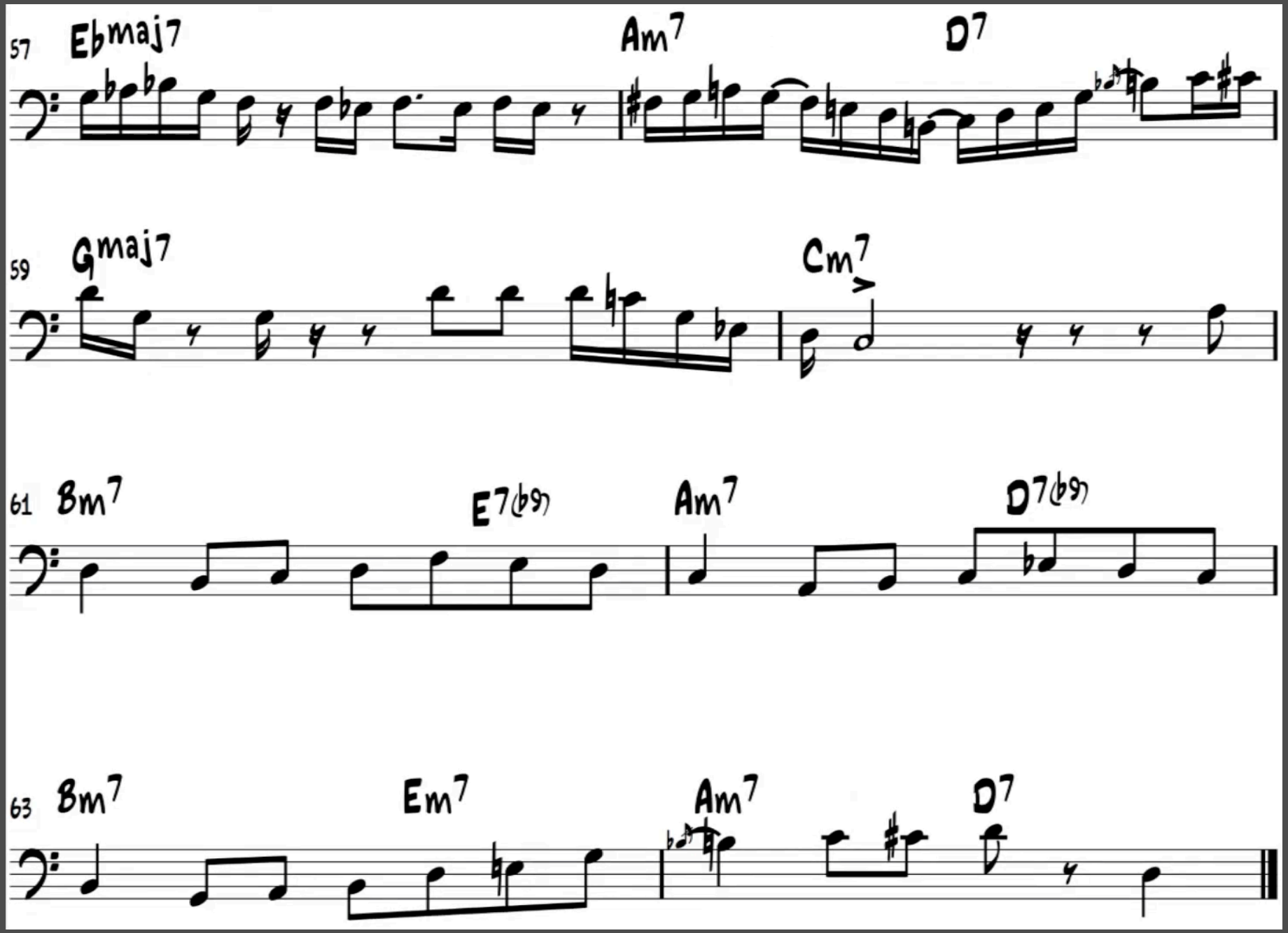

Gmaj7
17
%
Gm7
19
C7
Fmaj7
21
%
Fm7
23
Bb7


Ebmaj7
Am7(b5)
D7
25
Gmaj7
Cm7
27
Bm7
E7
Am7
D7
GLISS.
29
Gmaj7
D7
GLISS.
31

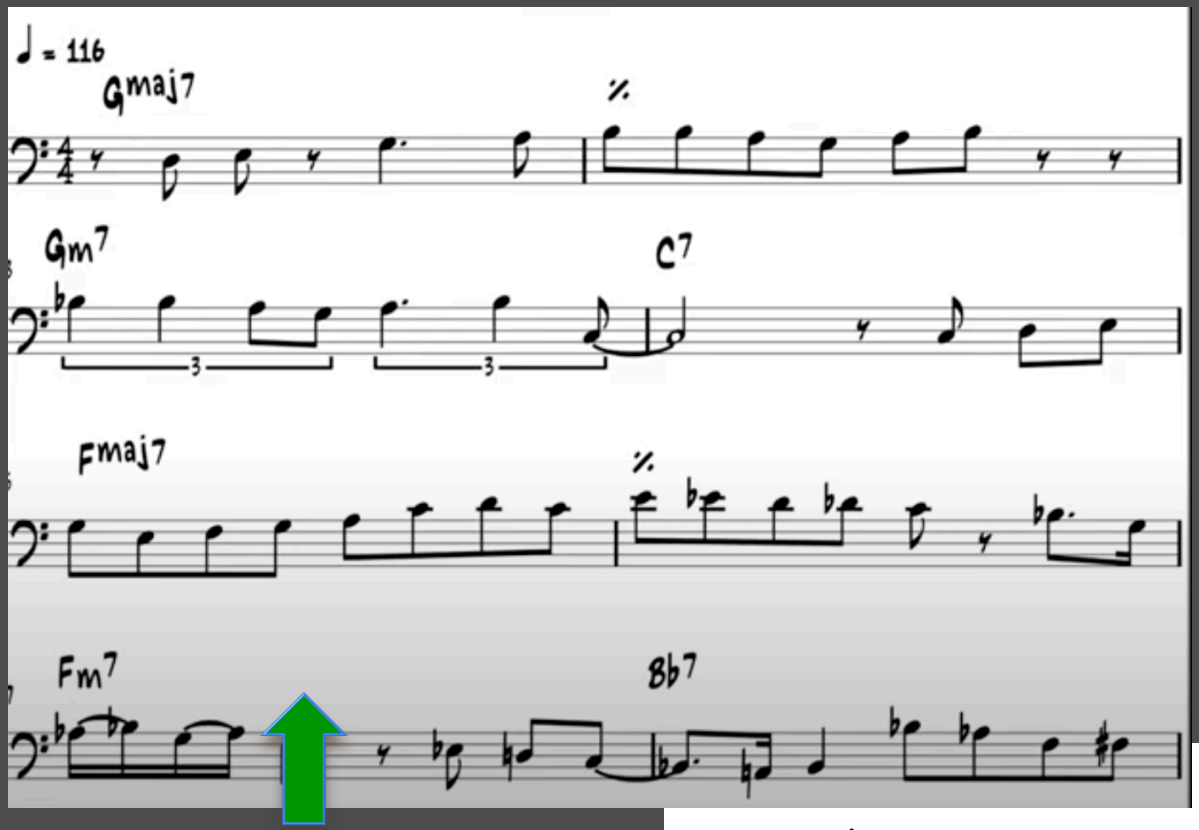

Gmaj7
33
%
3
Gm7
35
C7
Fmaj7
37
%
Fm7
39
Bb7


41
Ebmaj7
Am7
D7
43
Gmaj7
Cm(maj7)
GLISS.
45
Gmaj7
GLISS.
E7
GLISS.
GLISS.
47
Am7
D7


49
Gmaj7
%
Gm7
51
C7
Fmaj7
53
%
Fm7
55
Bb7
GLISS.

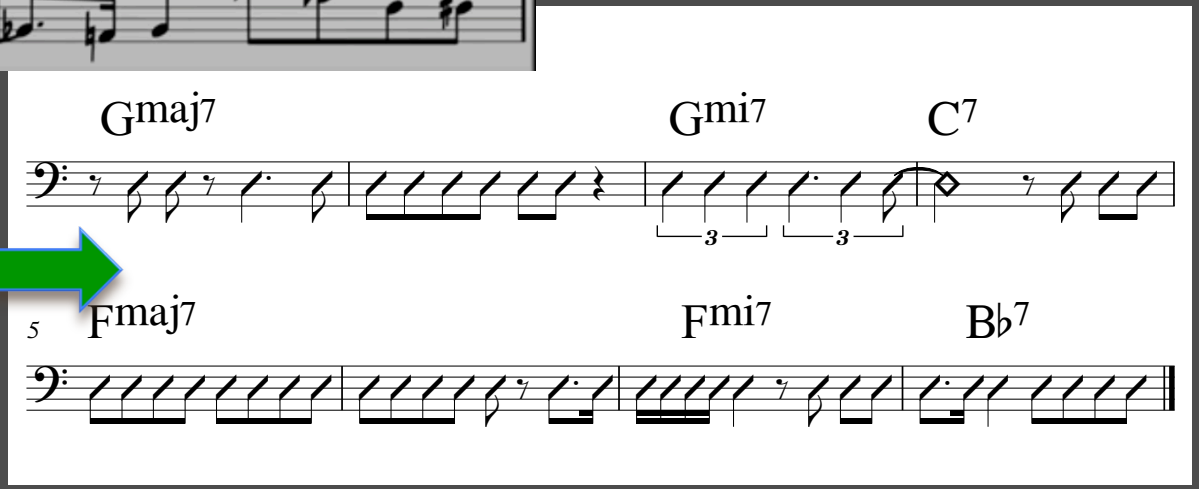

57
Ebmaj7
Am7
D7
59
Gmaj7
Cm7
61
Bm7
E7(b9)
Am7
D7(b9)
63
Bm7
Em7
Am7
D7

7. Compose a solo – compose from memory and use specific concepts. i.e. Melody, space, rhythm, bebop, horizontal structures, etc.



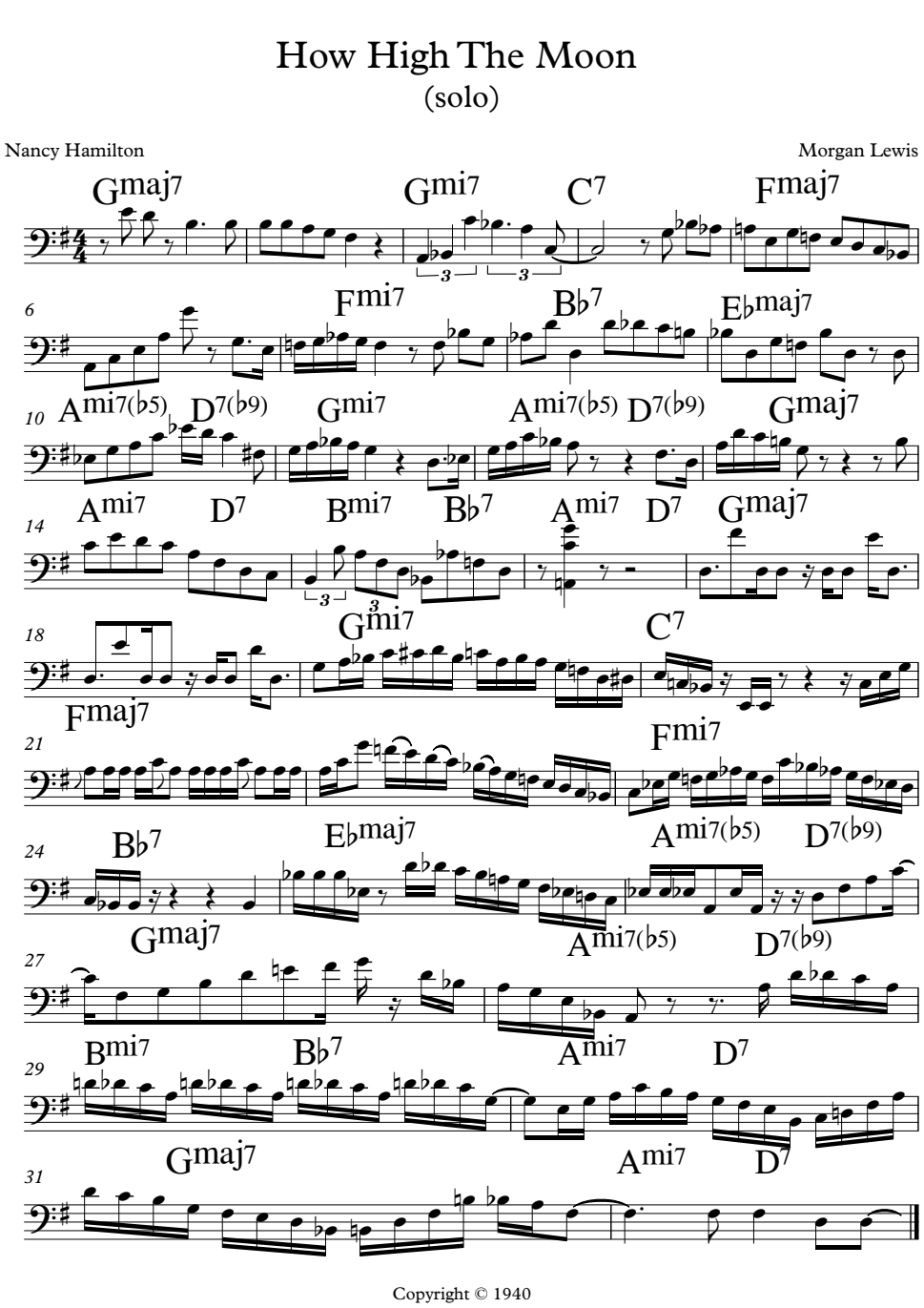
Ray Brown's solo

Phrasing ideas
For new solo



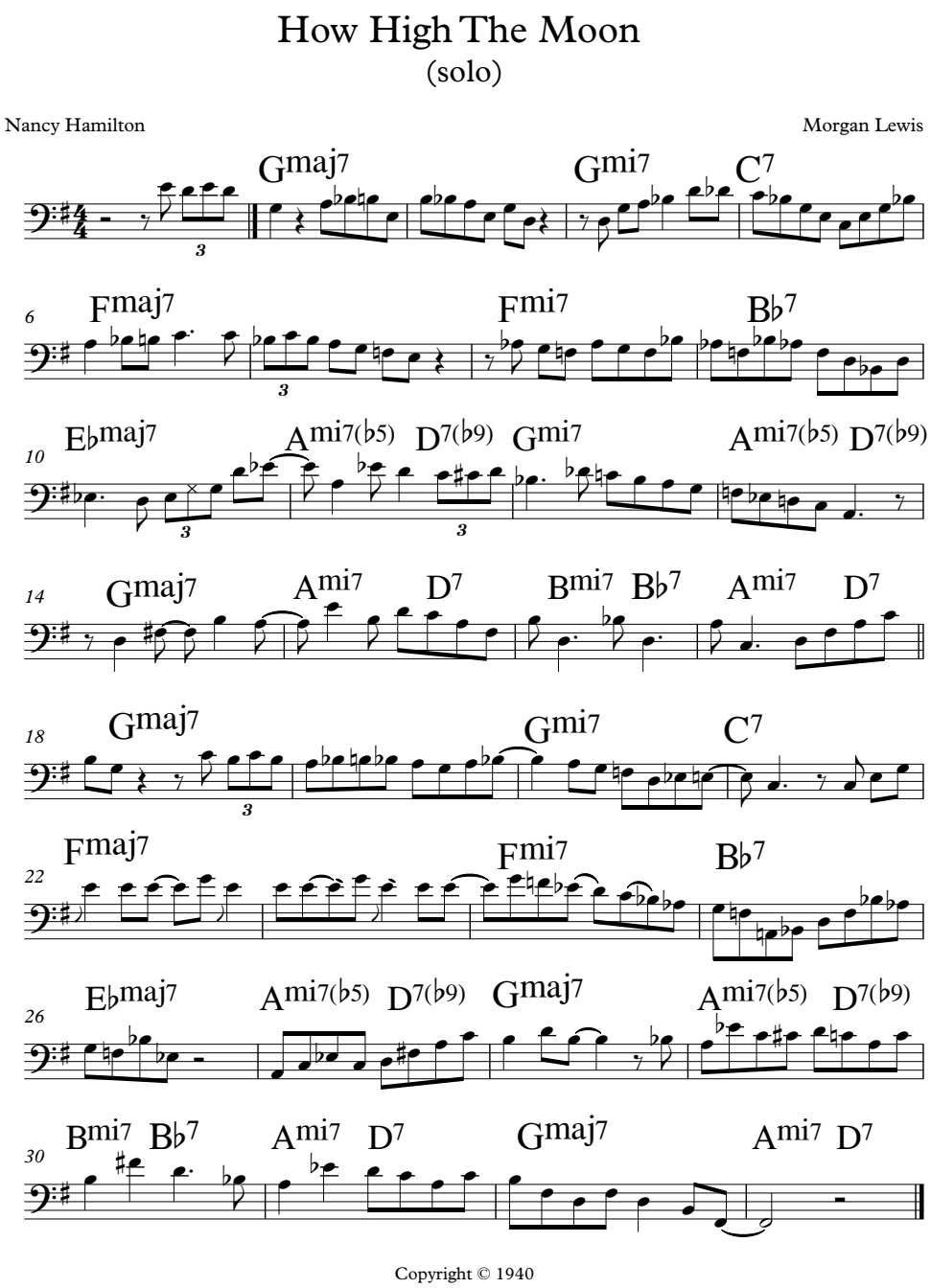
For this particular solo, my concept was to roughly copy Ray Brown's phrasing and rhythmic development.

Extracting the rhythms from Ray, I can then improvise new pitches. The first eight bars might look something like this:



Here's what I came up with using Ray Brown's phrasing as a template... It's challenging to play!!

But this did generate some new ideas, particularly regarding the length of eighth/sixteenth note lines. And I learned that Ray is tremendously successful at improvising material that not only sounds good, and meets the demands of the changes, but that is playable on the instrument.



A second attempt...

This time I used more of my natural vocabulary. It's much easier to play, and is intended for a faster tempo. Perhaps not as interesting rhythmically or harmonically, but it flows better. And there are still some challenging ideas for me to shed that were a result of having done the previous Ray Brown work...

8. Now play the tune in other keys –
Play the melody, Walk the bass in 2 & 4, and Improvise a chorus or two of solo

An effective (& frequently hilarious) way to practice tunes in other keys is in a duo with a fellow musician. Here's the setup:

One of you, say a saxophonist, will begin playing the melody in any key. The bass player will join in after a few bars, figuring out the key as quickly as possible, without anyone stopping. When you are able to settle in on the key, play the tune together for one complete chorus. At the end of the chorus, again without stopping, the bass player will play the melody in the new key, and the sax will play the bass line, finding the new key as quickly as they can. There will likely be some train-wreck moments! But continue alternating like this, and quickly you will begin to hear the key modulation accurately. You can also proceed each modulation by a quick ii7, V7, if the melody permits.

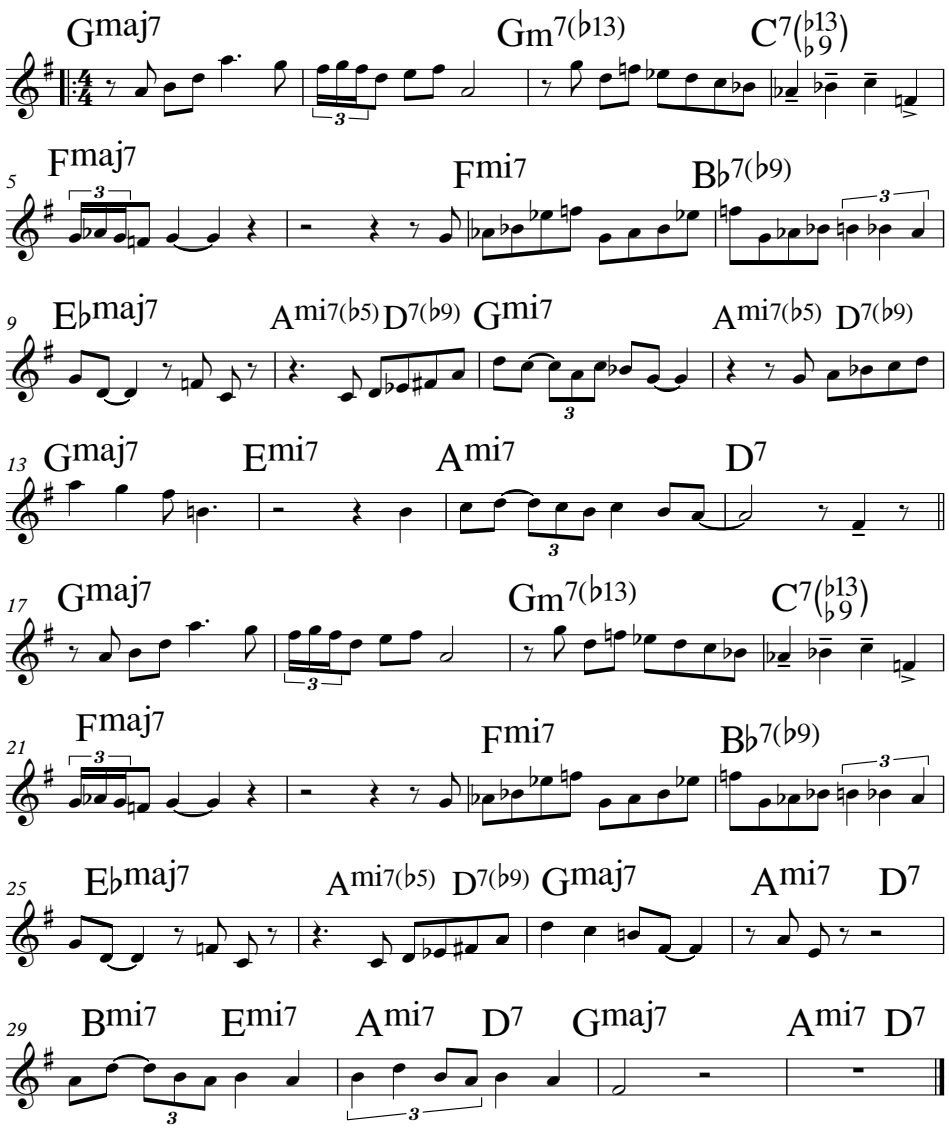
Try it! It's fun!

9. Compose a contrafact – write your own line/tune over the changes

30 Earths Away, Give or Take

(How High The Moon Contrafact for MJI Workshop)

C. Schaub



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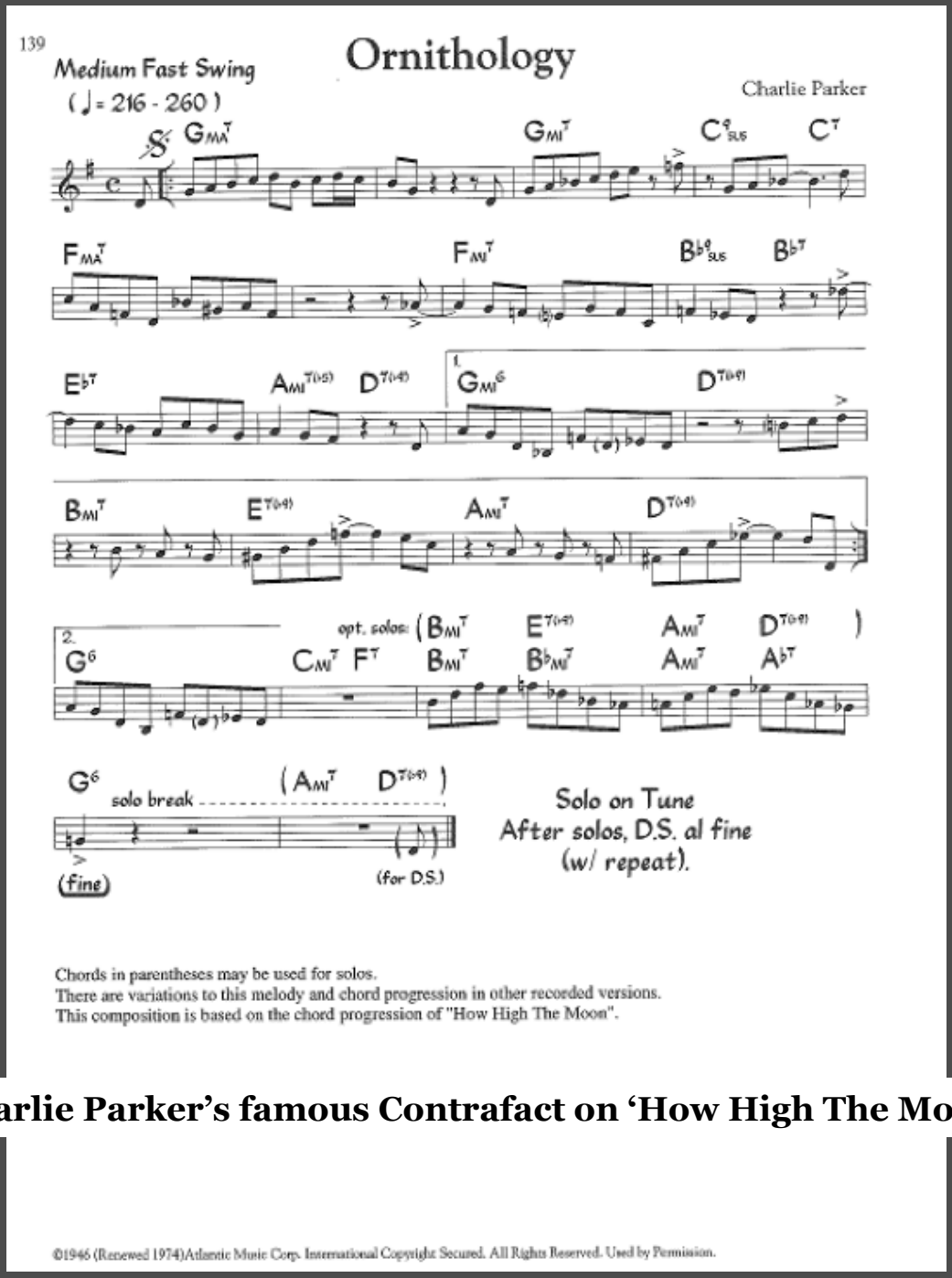
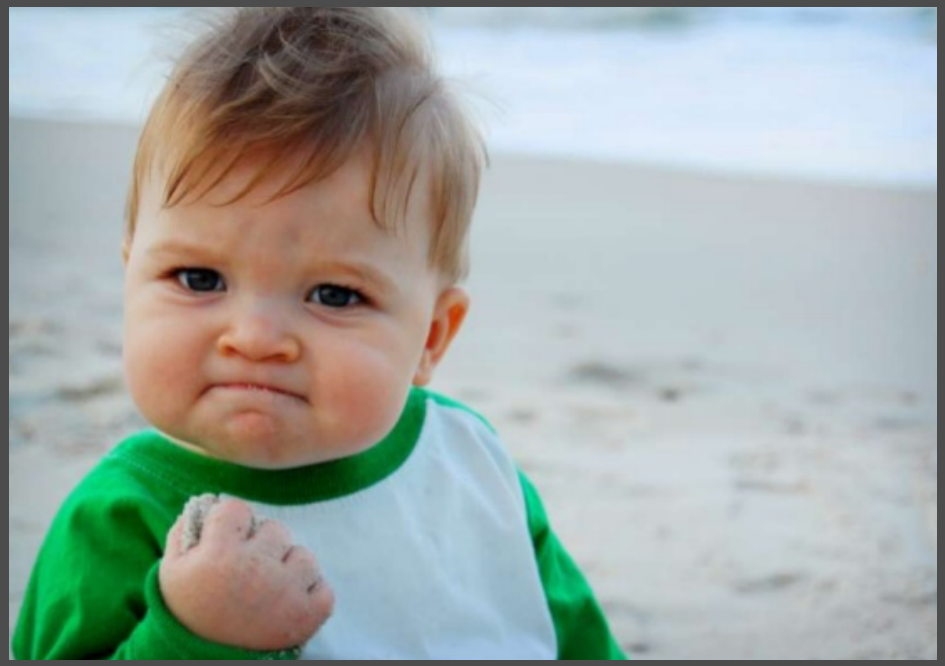


Charlie Parker's famous Contrafact on 'How High The Moon'

10. Now play the melody with your own embellishments

...And let's hear Bird Again

Hooray!!!



You learned a tune!!!

…And this ends our study of Neal Miner's 10 Steps

Here's a quick look at another approach to practicing improvisation. This is from Denver-based educator Eric Gunnison - pianist for Carmen McRae, Roberta Gambarini, Ron Miles, etc.

The idea here is to choose one or a few of these to practice on a tune.

Limit your scope and don't let yourself fall back into familiar habits.

Improviser's Menu

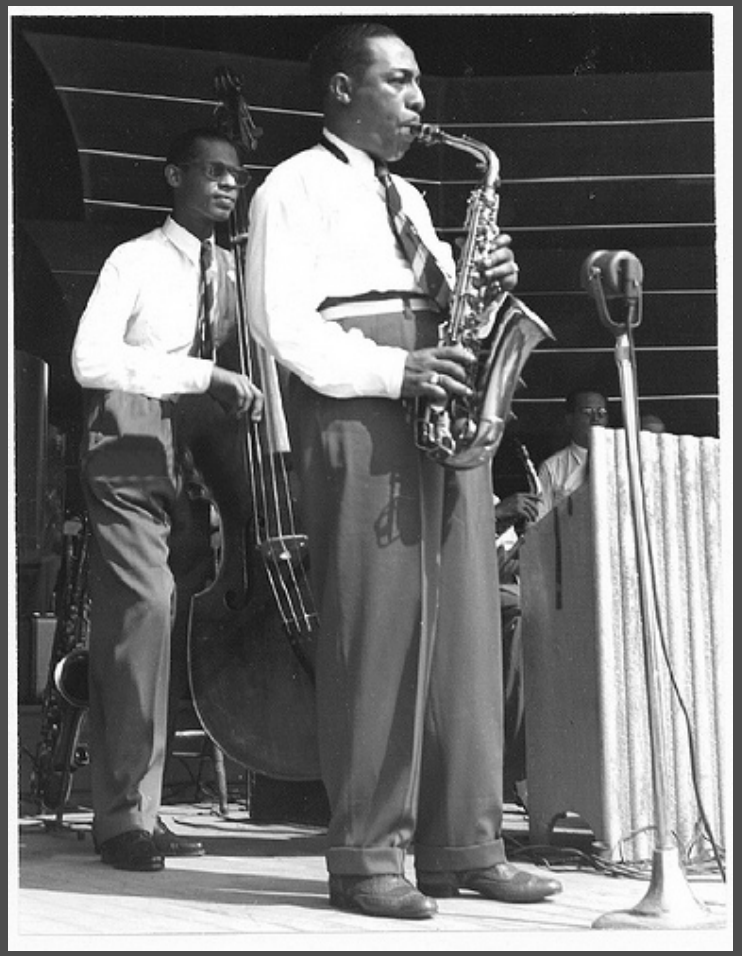
Rhythmic	Harmonic	Melodic
-	Upper Extensions	Upper Extensions
-	Pentatonics/Cells	Pentatonics/Cells
-	Multi-Tonic Systems	
Displacement	Displacement	Displacement
-	-	Encirclement/Chromaticism
Metric Modulation	Modulation	Modulation
Superimposition	Superimposition	Superimposition

Some of The Great Bassists In Jazz

(Chronologically By Birthdate)

1. **Milt Hinton** (June 23, 1910 – December 19, 2000) - Mean to Me
2. **Slam Stewart** (September 21, 1914 – December 10, 1987) - I Got Rhythm
3. **Jimmie Blanton** (October 5, 1918 – July 30, 1942) - Pitter Panther Patter
4. **Israel Crosby** (January 19, 1919 – August 11, 1962) – But Not For Me
5. **George Duvivier** (August 17, 1920 – July 11, 1985) - The Sicks of Us
6. **Charles Mingus** (April 22, 1922 – January 5, 1979) – II B.S.
7. **Oscar Pettiford** (September 30, 1922 – September 8, 1960) - Tricotism
8. **Percy Heath** (April 30, 1923 – April 28, 2005) - One Bass Hit
9. **Wilbur Ware** (September 8, 1923 – September 9, 1979) - Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise
10. **Sam Jones** (November 12, 1924 – December 15, 1981) – Come Sunday
11. **Ray Brown** (October 13, 1926 – July 2, 2002) – How High The Moon
12. **Red Mitchell** (September 20, 1927 – November 8, 1992) – I Remember You
13. **Pierre Michelot** (March 3, 1928 – July 3, 2005) – Willow Weep For Me
14. **Bob Cranshaw** (December 3, 1932 – November 2, 2016) – God Bless The Child
15. **Doug Watkins** (March 2, 1934 – February 5, 1962) – Blue 7
16. **Paul Chambers** (April 22, 1935 – January 4, 1969) – Ease it
17. **Scott LaFaro** (April 3, 1936 – July 6, 1961) – My Romance
18. **Ron Carter** (May 4, 1937 –) – Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise
19. **Charlie Haden** (August 6, 1937 – July 11, 2014) - Peace
20. **Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen** (May 27, 1946 – April 19, 2005) – Reunion Blues
21. **Etc.**

Picking up the bass in 1936, Jimmie Blanton played the instrument for only 5 years- dying of tuberculosis at the age of 23. Yet, his performing and recording with Duke Ellington altered the future of the bass in jazz. Jimmie's left hand facility, clarity of sound, fine intonation, and soloistic approach to the instrument were remarkable for the time. Check out Jimmie on the first ever recorded piano and bass duet Plucked Again; as well as his fine work on Jack The Bear, Pitter Panther Patter, & Sepia Panorama.



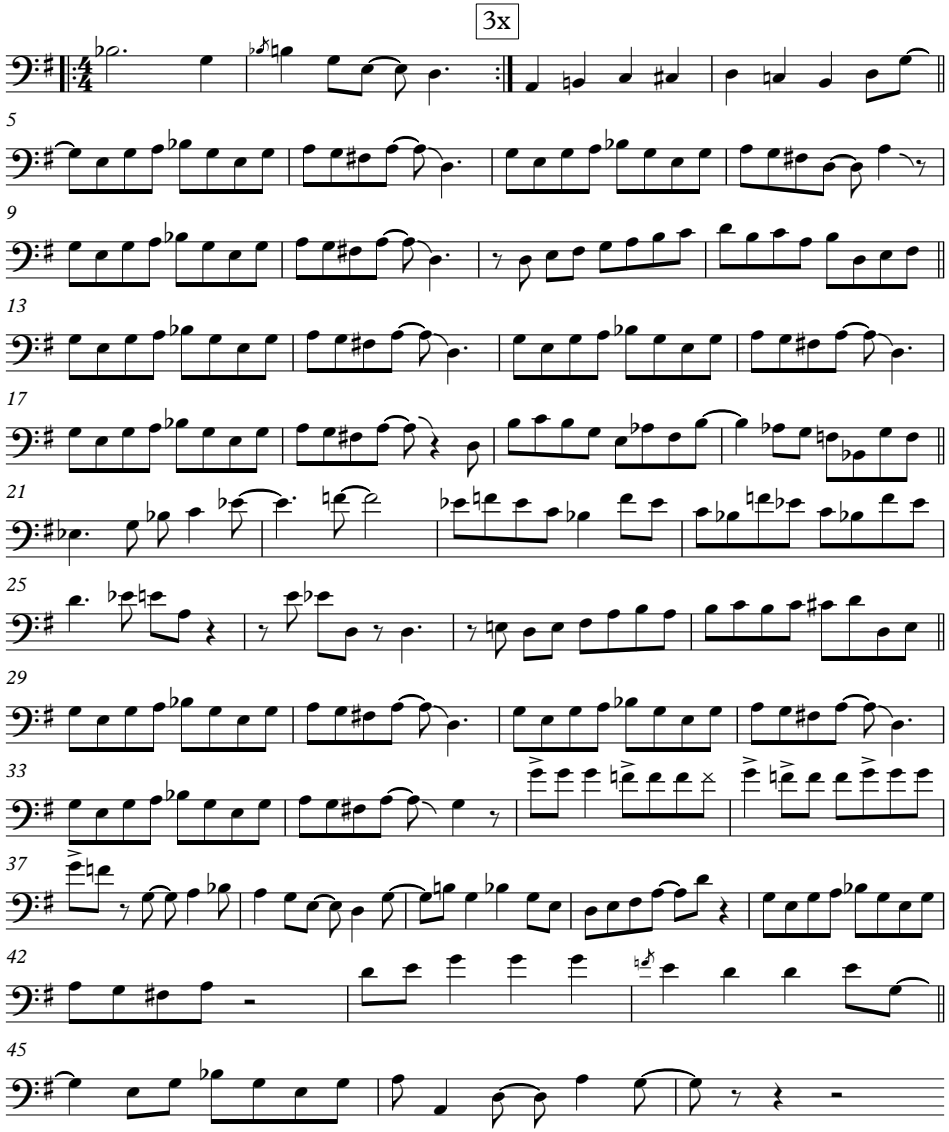
J I M M I E B L A N T O N

Pitter Panther Patter

(Excerpt)

Trans. - C. Schaub
11/2020

E.K. Ellington & Jimmie Blanton



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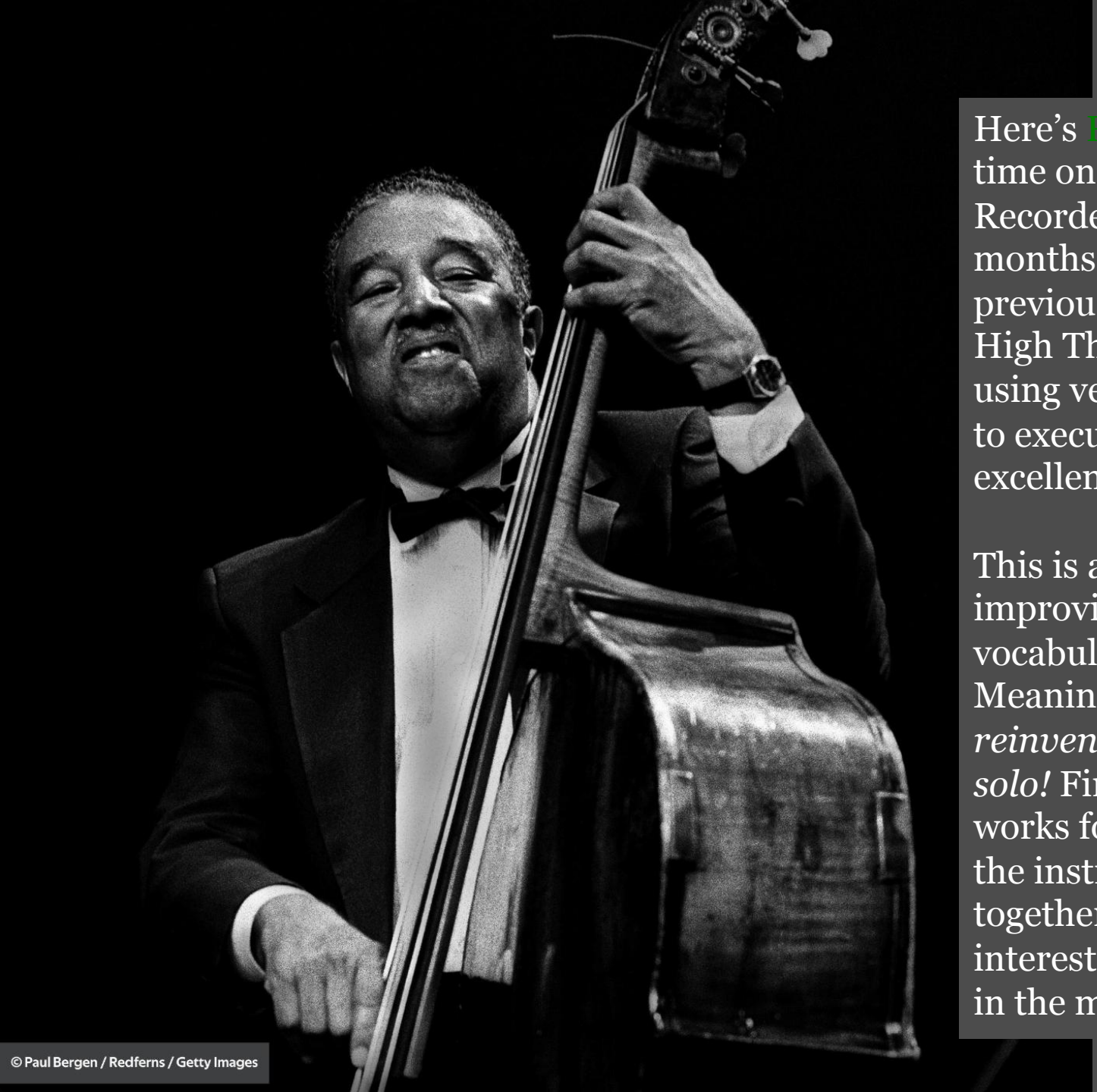
"...Two elements of Blanton's style can be described as idiomatic devices. His use of pizzicato, arco, and slapping techniques, and his articulation with the bow achieve a breathy, 'horn-like' sound on the double bass. There is also an idiomatic character to certain patterns, such as three chromatic pitches fingered 1-2-4 on the bass between shifts of position. In fact, Blanton's deployment of his vocabulary reflects a constant awareness of idiomatic effect: his choice of pitch, register, and articulation is always directed toward achieving maximum projection of a clear, sustained tone quality and a flexible, swinging rhythmic flow.

Extracted from The Solo Vocabulary of Jazz Bassist Jimmie Blanton by Robert Nash, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 1999 page 39

...1-2-4 *s* 1-2-4 *s* 1-2-4 *s*...

In my opinion, there was a whole generation of bassists that built on, or grew along side of, Blanton - developing and deepening the bebop language of the bass: Oscar Pettiford, Charles Mingus, Israel Crosby, Paul Chambers, Sam Jones, Ray Brown, Bob Cranshaw, Doug Watkins, etc.

Here, 25 years after Blanton, is Bob Cranshaw using the same 'idiomatic device' attributed above to Blanton to deal with a brisk tempo. Here and elsewhere, Cranshaw makes frequent use of the 'three chromatic pitches fingered 1-2-4 on the bass between shifts of position' to solve a technical difficulty.



Here's Ray Brown again- this time on 'Blues for Basie.' Recorded in 1955, just a few months earlier than the previous version of "How High The Moon,' Ray is using very similar material to execute yet another excellent bass solo.

This is an example of an improviser who has solid vocabulary at their disposal. Meaning- *you don't have to reinvent yourself with every solo!* Find the language that works for you, play it all over the instrument, and put it together in the most interesting way that you can in the moment.

Blues For Basie

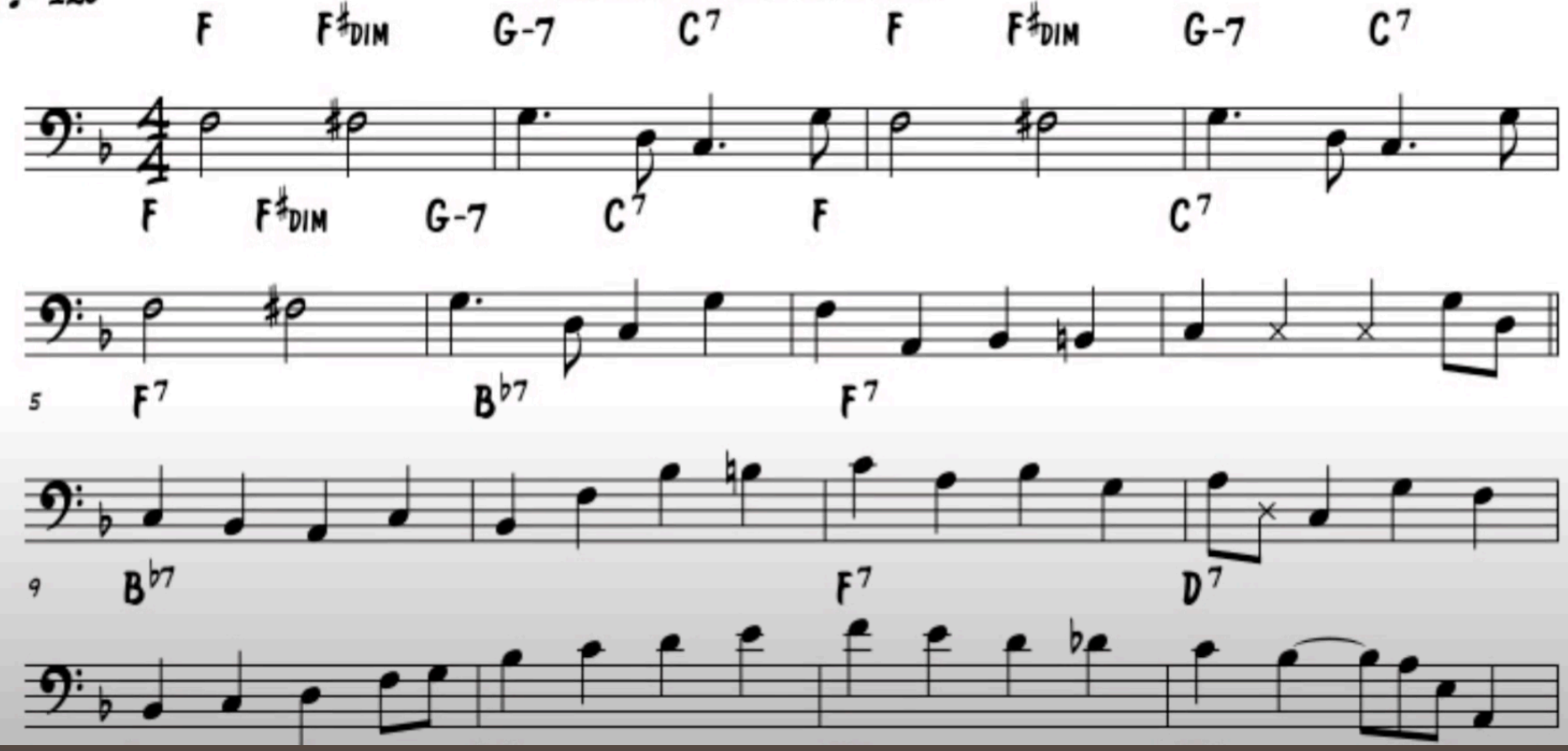
From album 'Oscar Peterson Plays Count Basie' (Clef 1955)

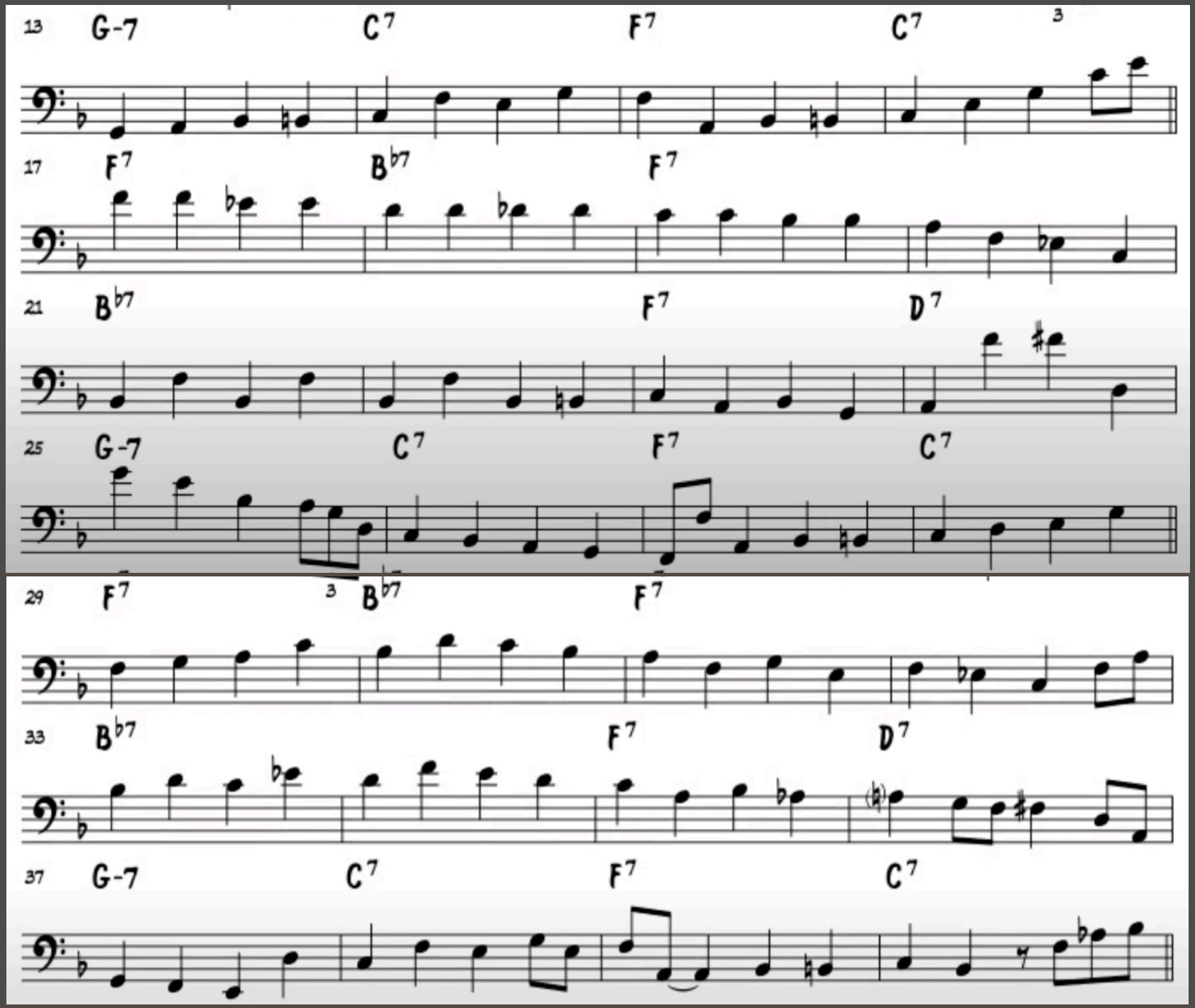
Ray Brown's Bassline and solo

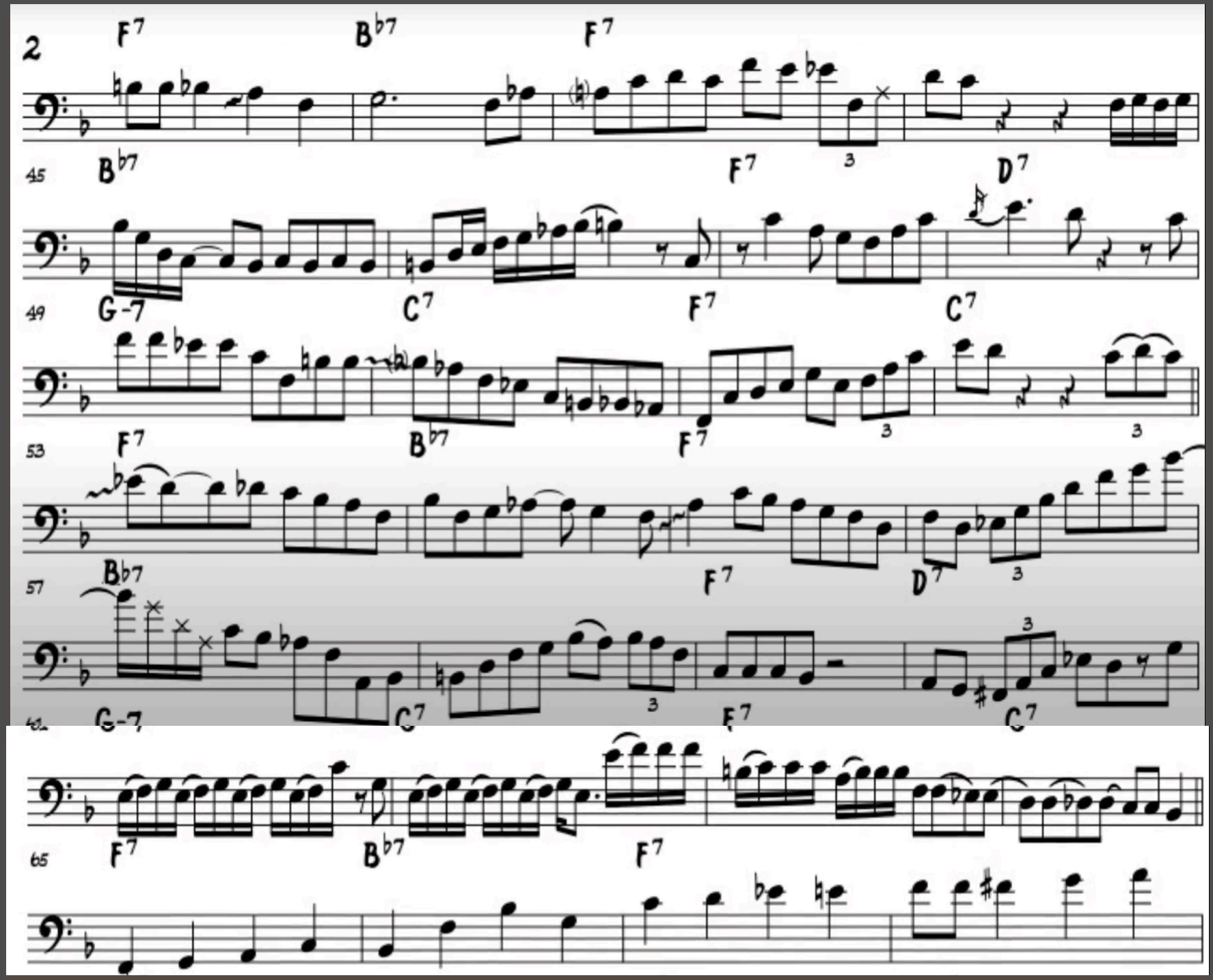
Oscar Peterson

Transcription: G. Ottaviani

♩= 120

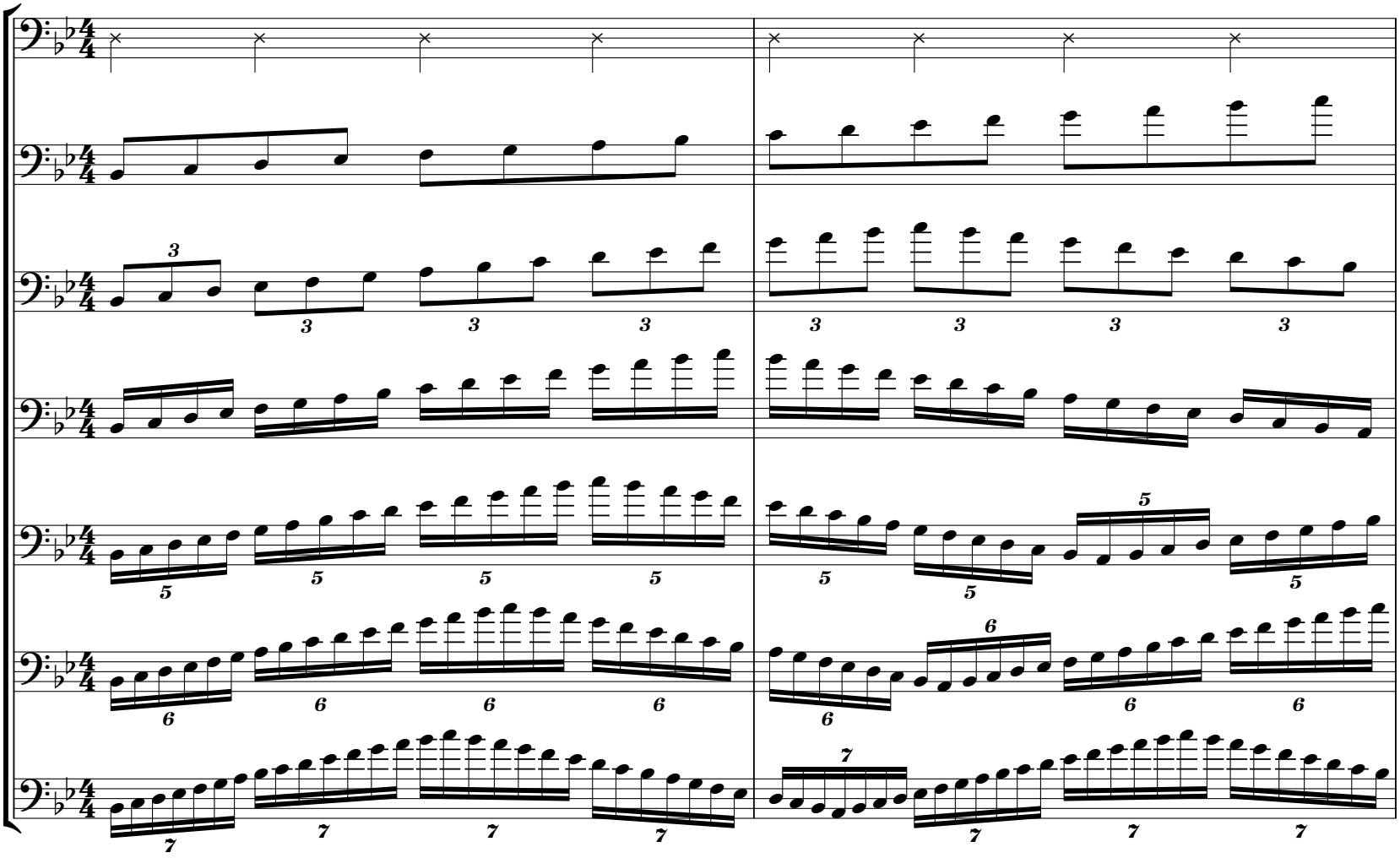


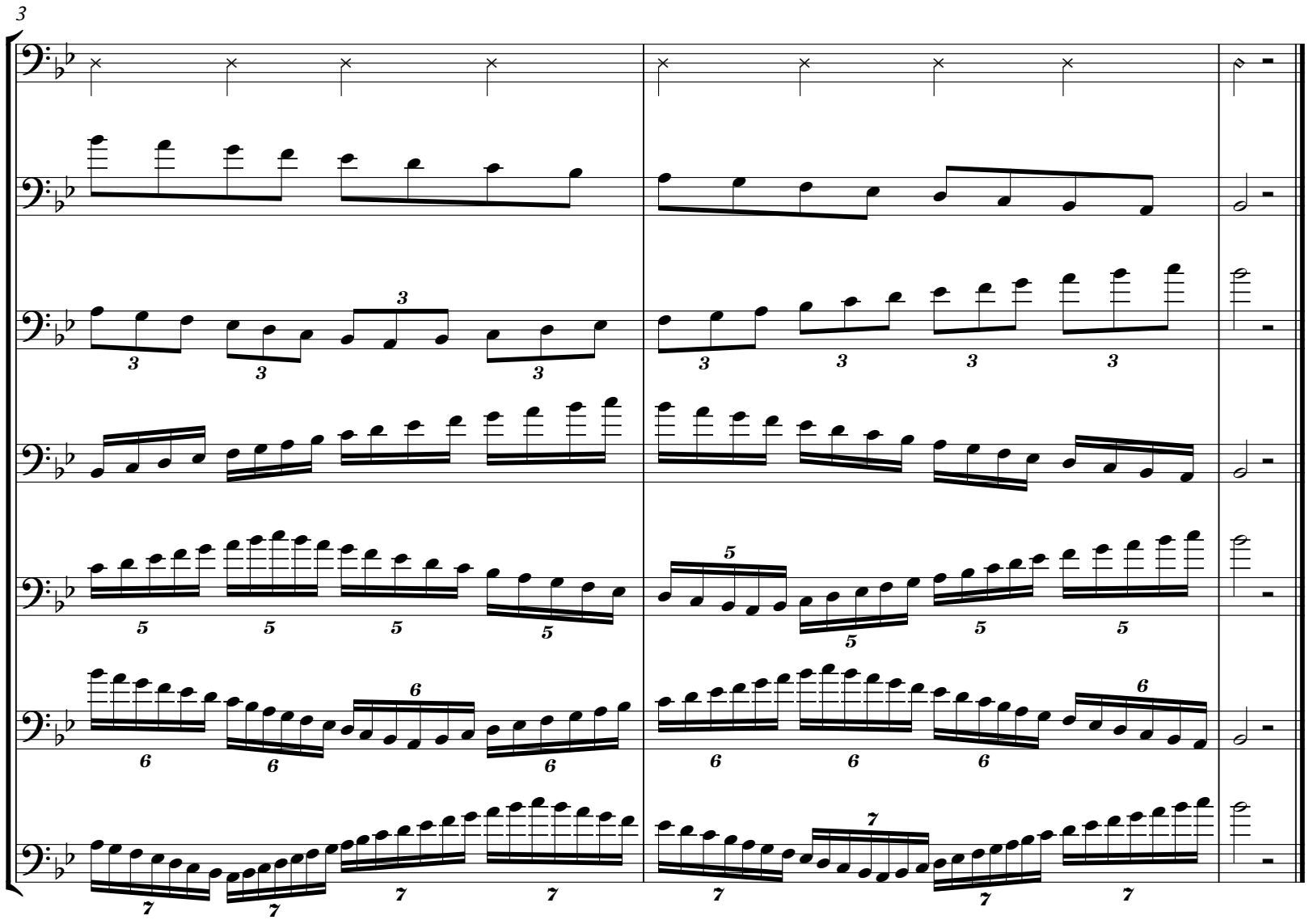

13 G-7 C7 F7 C7
17 F7 B♭7 F7
21 B♭7 F7 D7
25 G-7 C7 F7 C7
29 F7 B♭7 F7
33 B♭7 F7 D7
37 G-7 C7 F7 C7


2
F7
B♭7
F7
45
B♭7
F7
D7
49
G-7
C7
F7
C7
53
F7
B♭7
F7
57
B♭7
F7
D7
61
G-7
C7
F7
C7
65
F7
B♭7
F7

Here's one exercise that has been helpful for me recently to get more fluidity with scales – something Ray Brown encouraged:

Metronome click twice per bar, start about 80 bpm, & decrease as needed




3
Db.

Red Mitchell

Billie Holiday with Red Mitchell, Buddy DeFranco (cl), & Red Norvo (vib)

"Mitchell used standard tuning during the 1950s and for the first half of the 1960s, and produced sound similar to his professional jazz bass peers. However, in 1966 he switched to cello tuning on his bass (C-G-D-A, an octave below the cello, instead of the standard E-A-D-G). At the same time, he began adjusting the tone controls of his amplifier to create a soft, unfocused sound in the lowest notes and to emphasize the upper harmonics in higher notes. The result was an airy tone quality that sounded gentle, not muscular." (from Wikipedia)

Here with Hampton Hawes (piano) and Chuck Thompson (drums) is a great example of Red Mitchell's early work:
I Remember You (1:35)

I love it!! Maybe it's the melodicism, the sense of swing, the long bop lines, or all of the above… Whatever it is, it sounds good to me. If you've never heard Red Mitchell before, he's worth checking out.

To get a sense for Red's later work - when he was playing the bass with the cello tuning, and using the amp to produce a more gentle sound – spend time with these videos:

1978 Take The 'A' Train – Red Mitchell with Clark Terry
1970 Red Mitchell with Dizzy Gillespie in Brussels (bass solo at 7:00)
1987 Red Mitchell with Hank Jones

Jimmy Garrison

Jimmy Garrison

1966 –
East Broadway Rundown
with Sonny Rollins (tenor), Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), and Elvin Jones (drums).
(Bass solo at 5:00)

1963 –
with John Coltrane (tenor), McCoy Tyner (piano), and Elvin Jones (drums).
On 'Afro Blue,' 'Alabama,' & 'Impressions' from
Jazz Casual
(Bass solo at 17:30)

1962 –
Ballads with John Coltrane (tenor), McCoy Tyner (piano), and Elvin Jones (drums).
On 'Say It (Over & Over Again),' 'You Don't Know What Love Is,' 'Too Young to Go Steady,' 'All or Nothing At All,' 'I Wish I Knew,' 'It's Easy to Remember,' & 'Nancy With The Laughing Face'

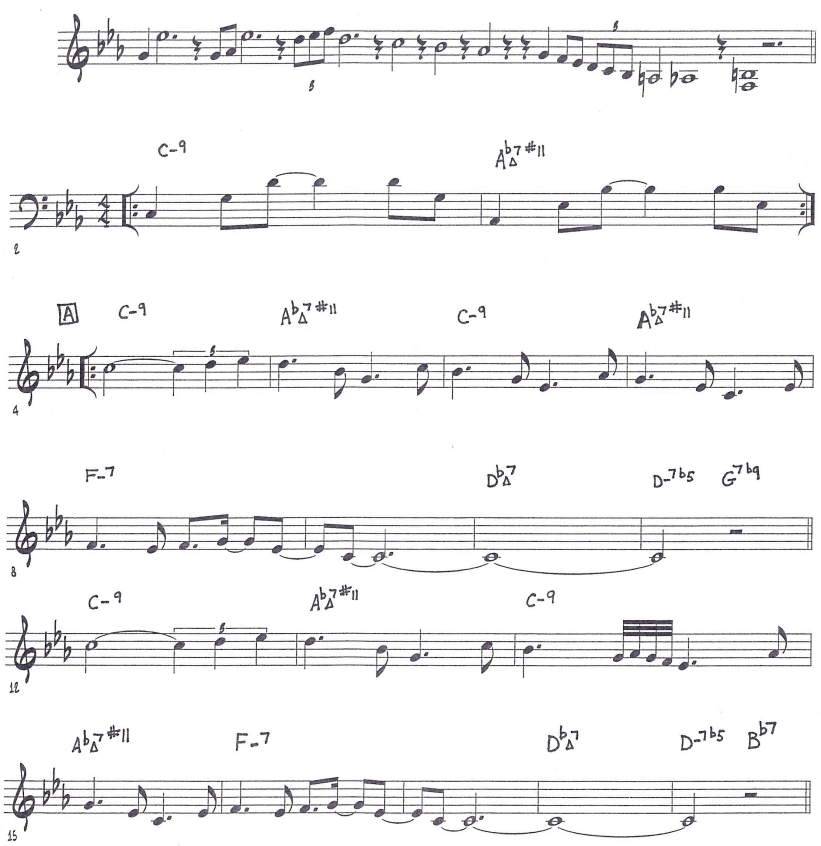
Rodney Whitaker

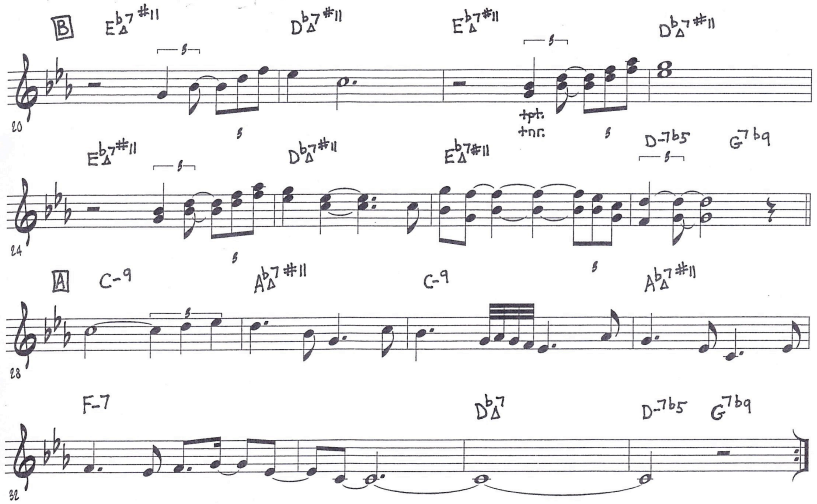
1993 –
with Roy Hargrove (trumpet), Ron Blake (tenor), Marc Cary (piano) and Gregory Hutchison (drums). On Rodney's tunes
For Rockelle (4:00) and
Love's Lament (1:00) from
Roy Hargrove's record 'Of Kindred Souls'

Building on his Detroit roots and enormous talent, Rodney Whitaker has earned an international reputation as one of the world's finest jazz double bass performer. He completed a seven-year tenure as bassist with Wynton Marsalis' Septet and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. He has toured the world over the last twenty-five years, collaborating and performing with legendary jazz artists such as Jimmy Heath, Cyrus Chestnut, Terence Blanchard, Kenny Burrell, Benny Golson, Pat Matheny, Nicholas Payton, Jimmy Cobb, Joshua Redman, Chick Corea, Kenny Garrett, Barry Harris, Cedar Walton, Donald Byrd, Branford Marsalis, Greg Hutchinson, Carl Allen, Herlin Riley, Jeff "Tain" Watts, Terrell Stafford, Bruce Barth, the late greats: Dizzy Gillespie, Mulgrew Miller, Tommy Flanagan, Joe Henderson, Hank Jones, Frank Morgan and Betty 'Bebop' Carter. Whitaker has also toured internationally as a featured performer with the Roy Hargrove Quintet. He currently teaches and serves as Artistic Director of the Michigan State University Professors of Jazz in East Lansing.

For Rockelle

-R. Whitaker

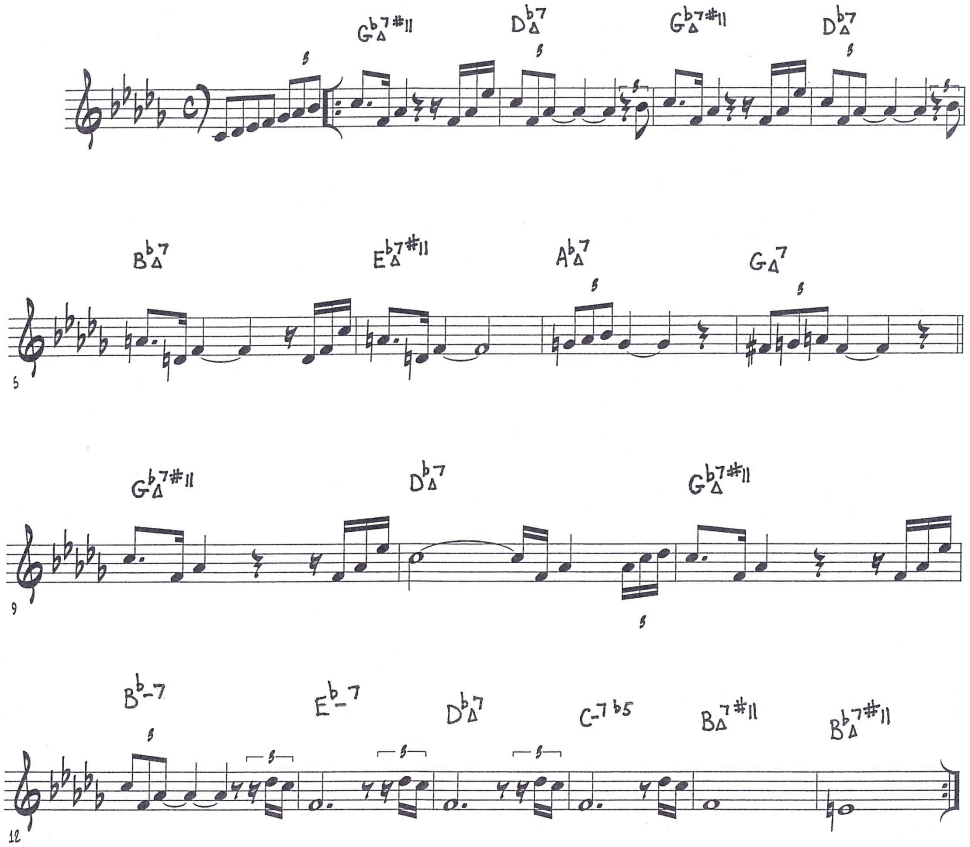




concert

Love's Lament

- R. Whitaker



Larry Grenadier

Brad Mehldau's long-time bassist, Larry Grenadier has had a successful career in jazz. Coming from a musical family, Grenadier already had a busy playing schedule by age 16, working in the San Francisco Bay Area with both local musicians and those traveling through town in need of a bass player. These musicians included Bobby Hutcherson, Joe Henderson, Eddie Henderson, Bruce Forman, Eddie Marshall, George Cables and Donald Bailey, Toots Thielmans, Johnny Griffin, Charles McPherson and Frank Morgan. While in undergraduate school at Stanford, he met and toured with Stan Getz. Graduating in 1989, Larry then moved to Boston to play with Gary Burton, and has continued to play with the world's best jazz musicians. His approach has come to dominate the modern sound concept.

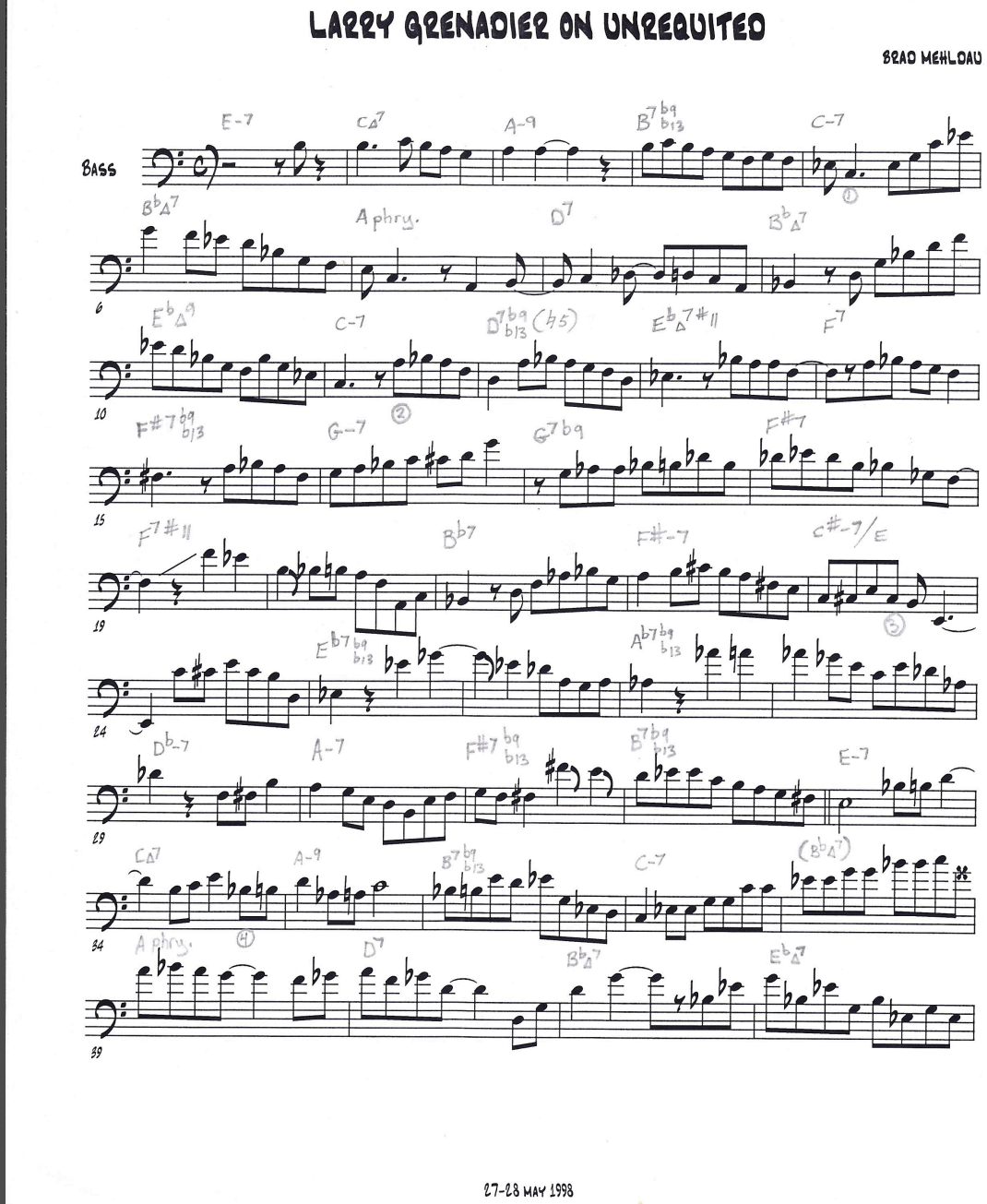
Unrequited

Anything Goes

Larry Grenadier at a recording session in 1985, age

© Brian M

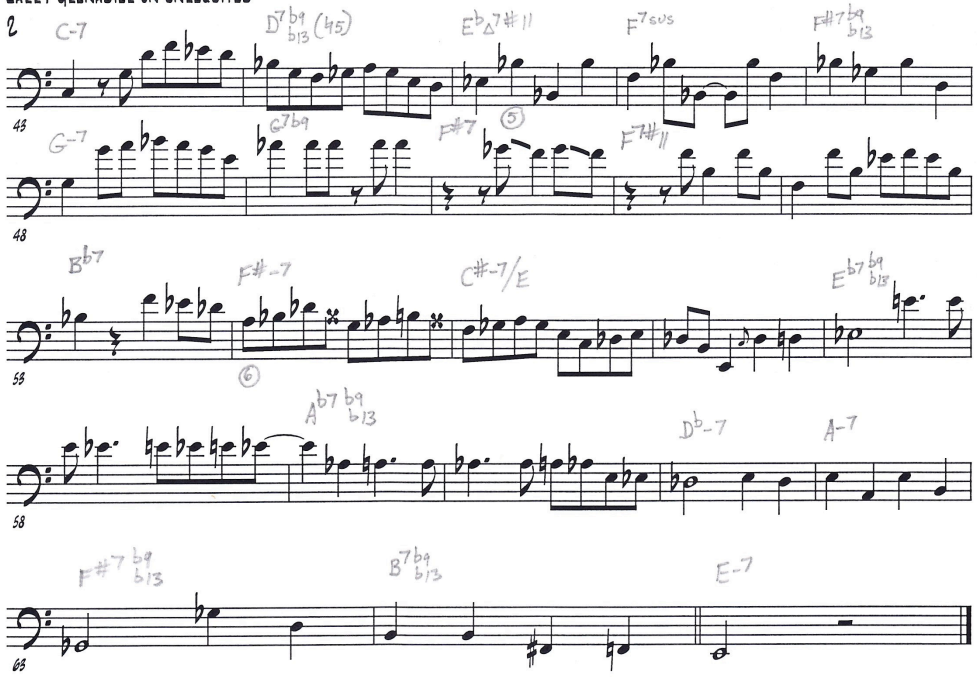
1:20



Unrequited
From Brad Mehldau
'Songs: The Art of
The of Trio,
Volume 3'
1998

Brad Mehldau (pno)
Jorge Rossy (dr)
Larry Grenadier (bs)

LARRY GRENADIER ON UNREQUITED

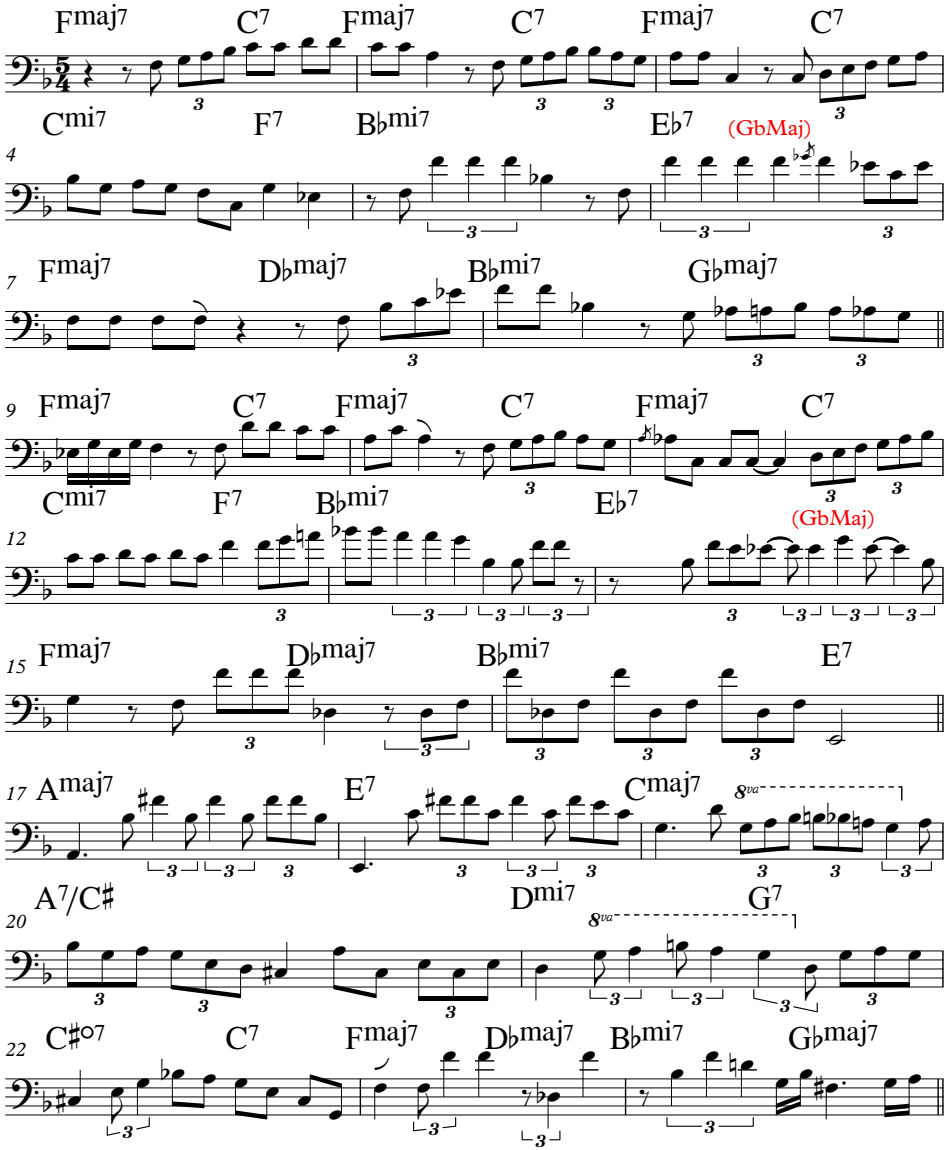


① Phrasing across barlines
② Motivic Development
③ across barline
④ Motivic Development
⑤ Nice Phrasing
⑥ Intervalic cell

Larry Grenadier on 'Anything Goes'

Trans. C. Schaub

Cole Porter



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Anything Goes

From 'Anything Goes'

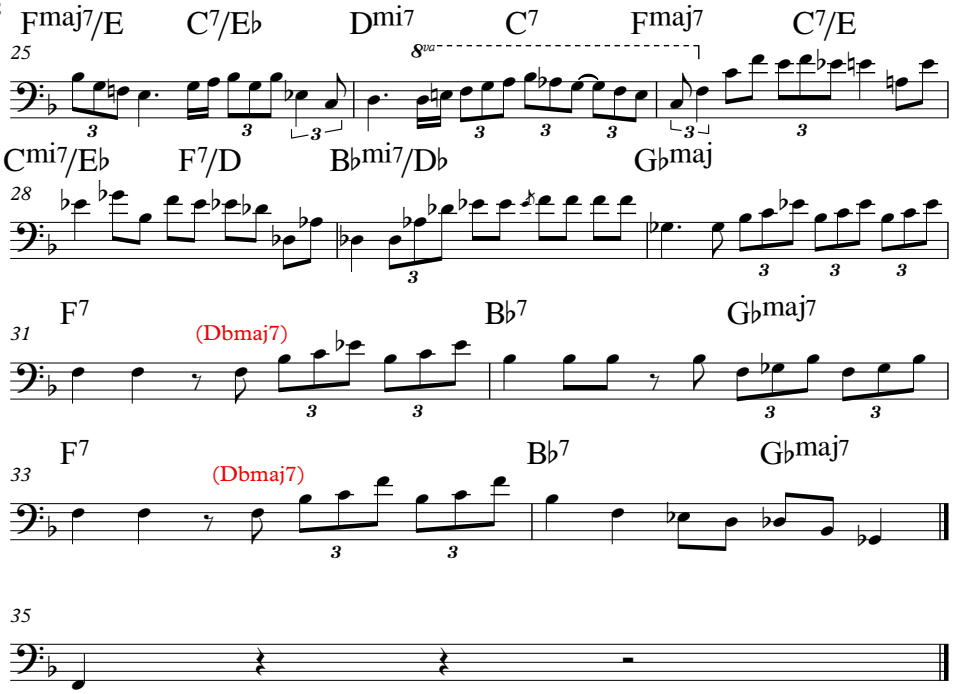
Recorded 10-8-2002

Released 2-24-2004

Brad Mehldau (pno)

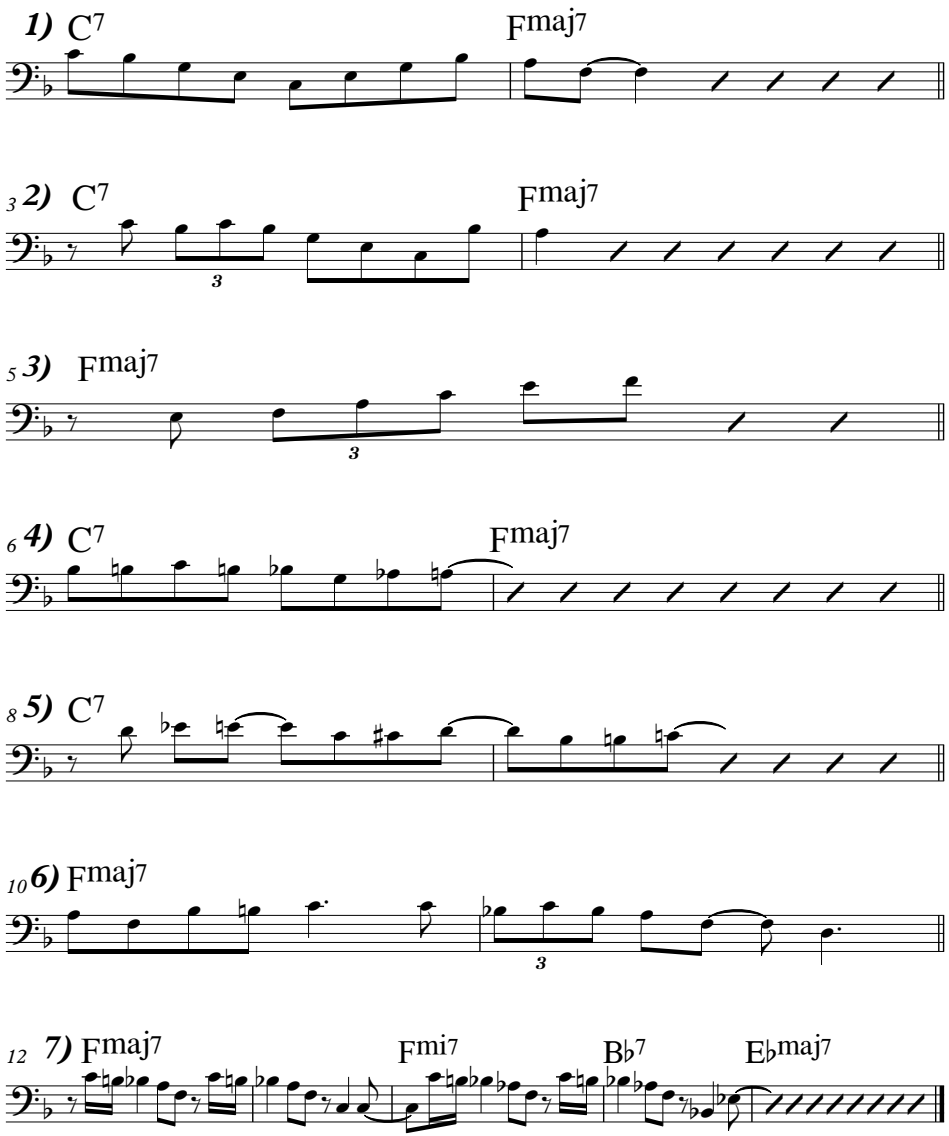
Jorge Rossy (dr)

Larry Grenadier (bs)


Fmaj7/E C7/Eb Dmi7 C7 Fmaj7 C7/E
25
8va
Cmi7/Eb F7/D Bbmi7/Db Gbmaj
28
F7 Bb7 Gbmaj7
31
(Dbmaj7)
F7 Bb7 Gbmaj7
33
(Dbmaj7)
35

© Guy Fonck

Drawing from these wonderful bassists and others, here are some examples of the kind of simple bebop vocabulary that I'm using frequently these days...



Finally, practice improvising by playing music,
by performing, – with other people! – whenever possible.
The importance of learning on the bandstand, can't be overstated.

Bouncin' With Bud

Bud Powell

Med. (-Up) Swing

(Intro)

(melody)

(sample bs. line)

A

(bs. walks in 4)

B

(pn., upper notes of block chords)

(pn.)

(melody)

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C

D

(chords follow bs. rhythms)

(pn. fill)

solo break

Solo on ABC;
After solos, D.C. al Coda.

No kicks during solos.

(pn., w/ 8va)

(N.C.)

(bs.)

background echoes at 5&6 and 13&14
of letter A and bars 5&6 of letter C: