MT. HOOD
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

DAN DAVEY

JAZZ PIANO BASICS

LEAD YOUR PIANIST ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

Your pianists need YOUR help in rehearsal! Don't expect private teachers to give them everything they need to be successful in YOUR ensemble on YOUR timeline. You need to have an understanding of the role of the piano and how to communicate voicings, comping, style, and more!

Joining the jazz band as a pianist (or any other rhythm section instrument) is much different than joining as a horn player. The "concert band notes" look shockingly similar to the "jazz band notes" on the page. The horn player has to learn style and listening responsibilities. The music you hand your pianist looks entirely different and can be very overwhelming unless you know how to help them.

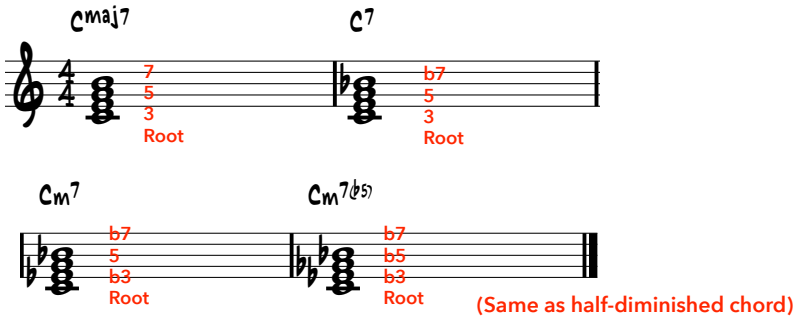
BASIC FOUR-NOTE CHORD SYMBOLS

Chord tones are numbered based on an 8-note scale using scale degrees 1 (Root), 3, 5, & 7. The following formulas are used to modify a major scale/arpeggio.

Basic Symbols:

- Major 7th: 1 3 5 7 — Cmaj7, Cma7, CM7, C△7
- Dominant 7th: 1 3 5 b7 — C7
- Minor 7th: 1 b3 5 b7 — Cmin7, Cmi7, Cm7, C-7
- Half-Diminished: 1 b3 b5 b7 — C⦸7, C⦸, Cmin7(b5), Cmi7(b5), Cm7(b5), C-7(b5), C-7(-5)
- Diminished 7th: 1 b3 b5 bb7 — Co7
- Minor-major 7th: 1 b3 5 7 — Cmin(maj7), C-(△7)

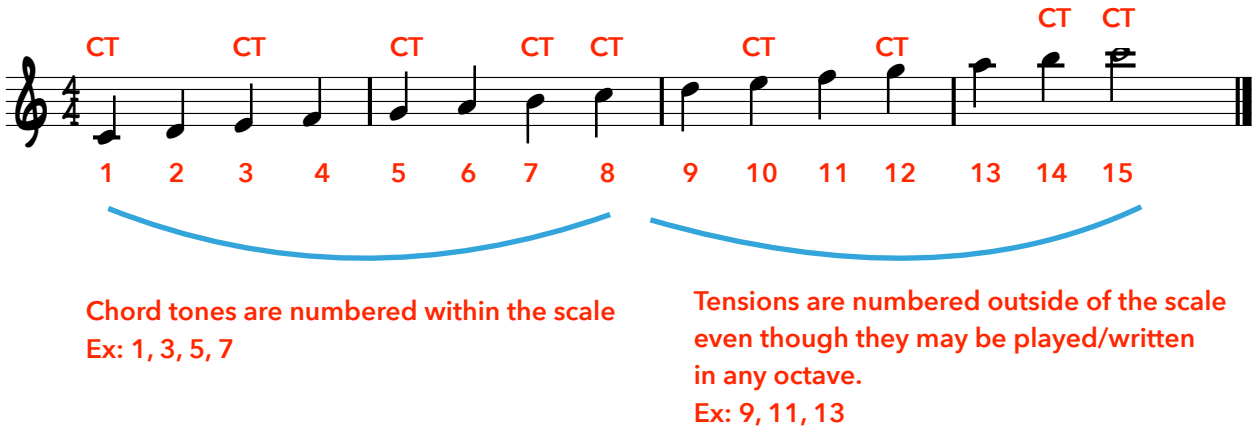
See the pattern of how each chord adds one flat to create the next.



Note: All of this may be applied to your guitarist as well!

WHAT ARE TENSIONS/EXTENSIONS?

Tensions are non chord tones that are added to a chord to change the color/texture of the chord.

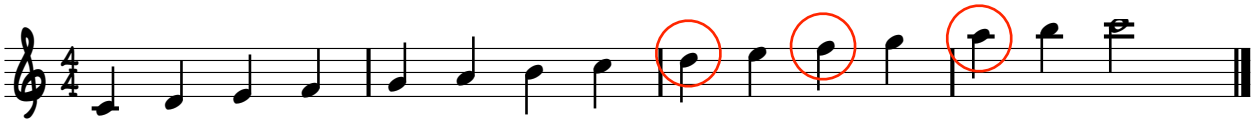


NUMBERING CHORD TONE EXTENSIONS

Note that scale degrees 10 is the same as 3, 12 the same as 5, 14 the same as 7, and 15 the same as and Root. All of these are Chord Tones (CT), and therefore, these are not tensions.

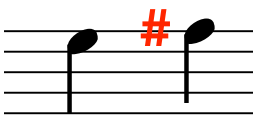
NUMBERING COMMON TENSIONS/EXTENSIONS

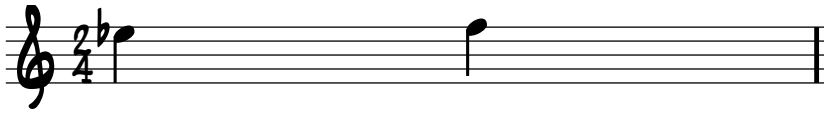
The most common tensions are 9, 11, and 13, or some form of these. Rule of Thumb: There must be a whole step above the 3rd of a chord, so an 11 may become a #11 on major and dominant chords.



THE 11 VS. #11

A half step above the 3rd of the chord confuses the sound of the chord.
On a major or dominant chord, raise the 11 so there is a whole step above the 3rd.
On a minor chord, the 11 is a whole step above the 3rd

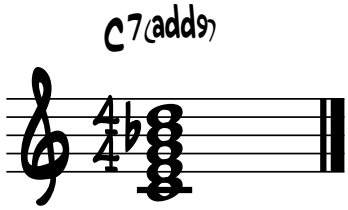




CHORD SYMBOLS WITH TENSIONS

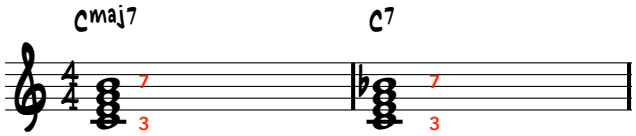
Chords with tensions use the basic four-note chord as the foundation. Young players may simply play the basic four-note chords until tensions are introduced to them.

- Ex: C9 is really a C7 with an added 9. Young musicians can simply play a C7 until tensions are introduced.

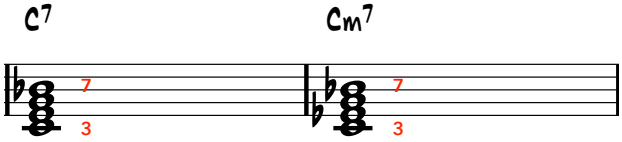


GUIDE TONES: THE FOUNDATION OF EVERY CHORD

- Guide Tones are the 3rd and the 7th of any chord.
- These two notes give us information on the quality of the chord
- The 3rd tells us if it is a major or minor chord
- The 7th tells us if it's a major seventh or a dominant seventh
- Cmaj7 vs. C7 - difference is the 7th



- C7 vs. Cm7 - difference is the 3rd

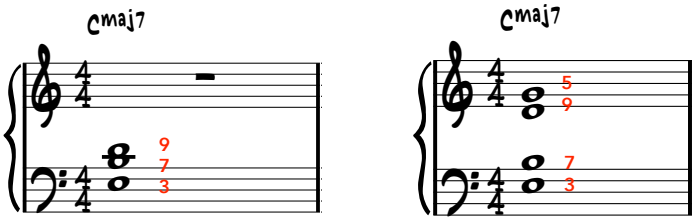


- As a pianist (or guitarist), playing the guide tones gives all of the harmonic information needed to
    - Play in a big band rhythm section;
    - Begin reading chord changes;
    - Play fast-moving changes

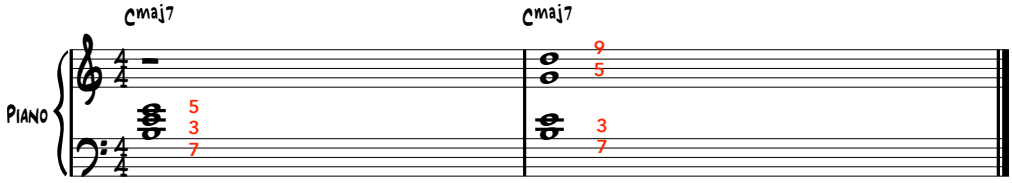
- Usually, the guide tones resolve within a step to the next chord. The 3rd of one chord becomes the 7th of the next, etc.
- Range of Voicing: D below middle C up to A above middle C
- When these voicings are performed, it's important that the pianist learn them in both hands so they can be used for comping behind another soloist, comping behind their own solo, or playing a melody in the right hand.
- Omit the root of the chord and have students double the voicings in both hands.

GUIDE TONE VOICINGS PLUS ONE

- Adding one note to our guide tone voicings creates a more rich and colorful sound.
- We add the 9 (or any alterations: b9, #9, etc.) and the 5th (or a substitute of 13, b13, b5, etc.)
- The pianist learn these voicings in both hands as well so they can be used for comping behind another soloist, comping behind their own solo, or playing a melody in the right hand.
- Range of Voicing: D below middle C up to C# one octave above middle C
- Mark Davis' Guideline:
    - For voicings with the 3rd on the bottom followed by the 7th, add the 9th on top (options of #9 and b9 for dominant chords). For a 4th note, add the 5th above.



    - For voicings with the 7th on the bottom followed by the 3rd, add the 5th on top (options of 13 or b13 on dominant chords). For a 4th note, add the 9th (options of b9 and #9 on dominant chords).



- To add another dimension to these voicings, the pianist may play one chord tone or tension in octaves in the right hand. This technique is helpful in cutting through a big band!

Guide Tone Voicings

ii - V - I in Cycle 5

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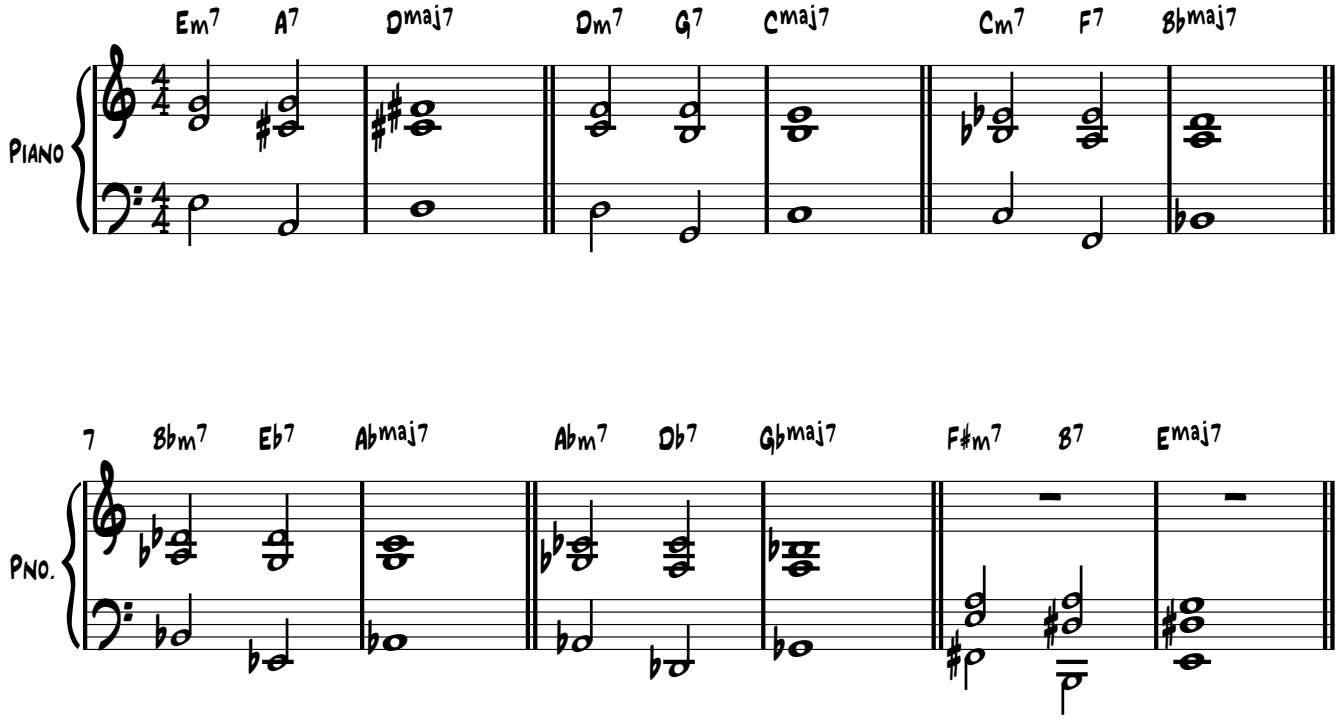
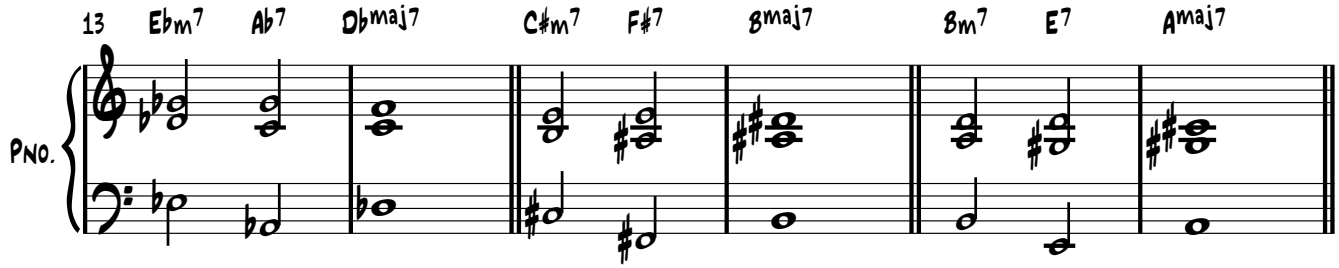
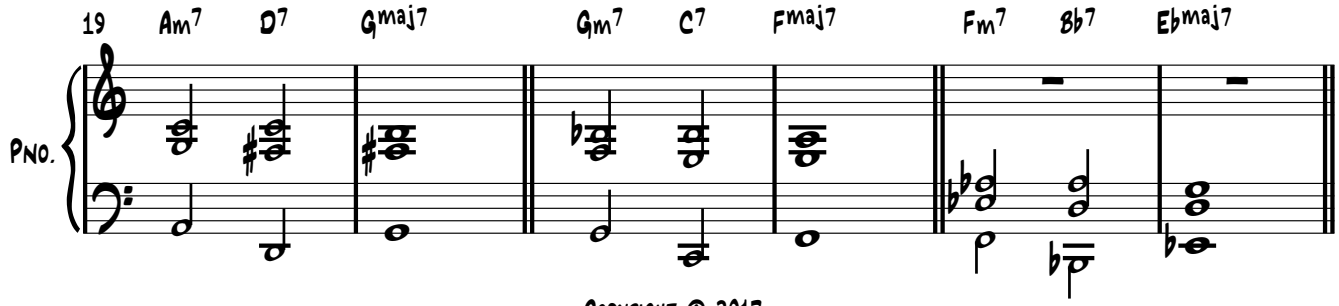
Form A1: 7th on bottom with 3rd above



Form A2:





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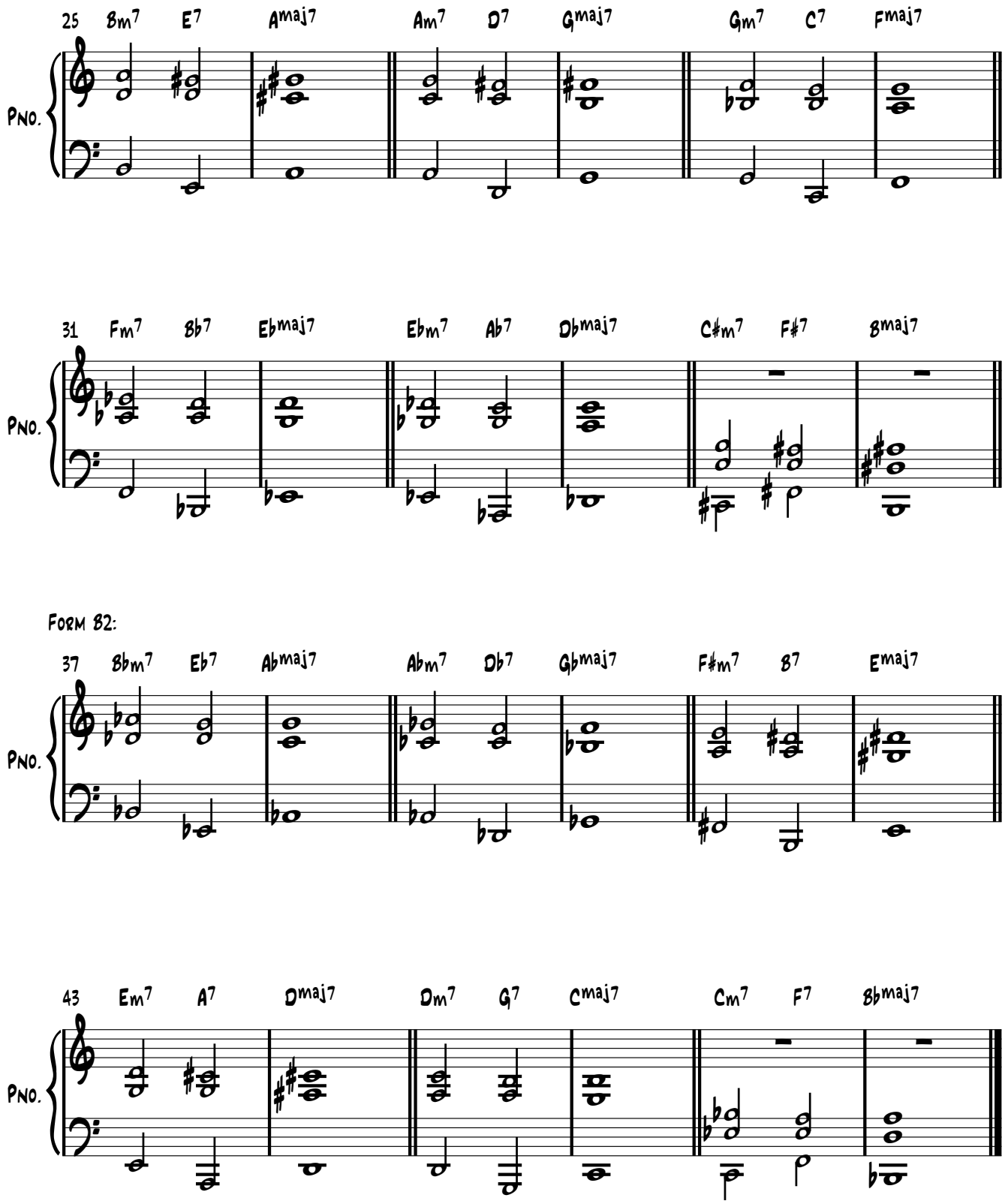
Form B1: 3rd on bottom with 7th above



Form B2:

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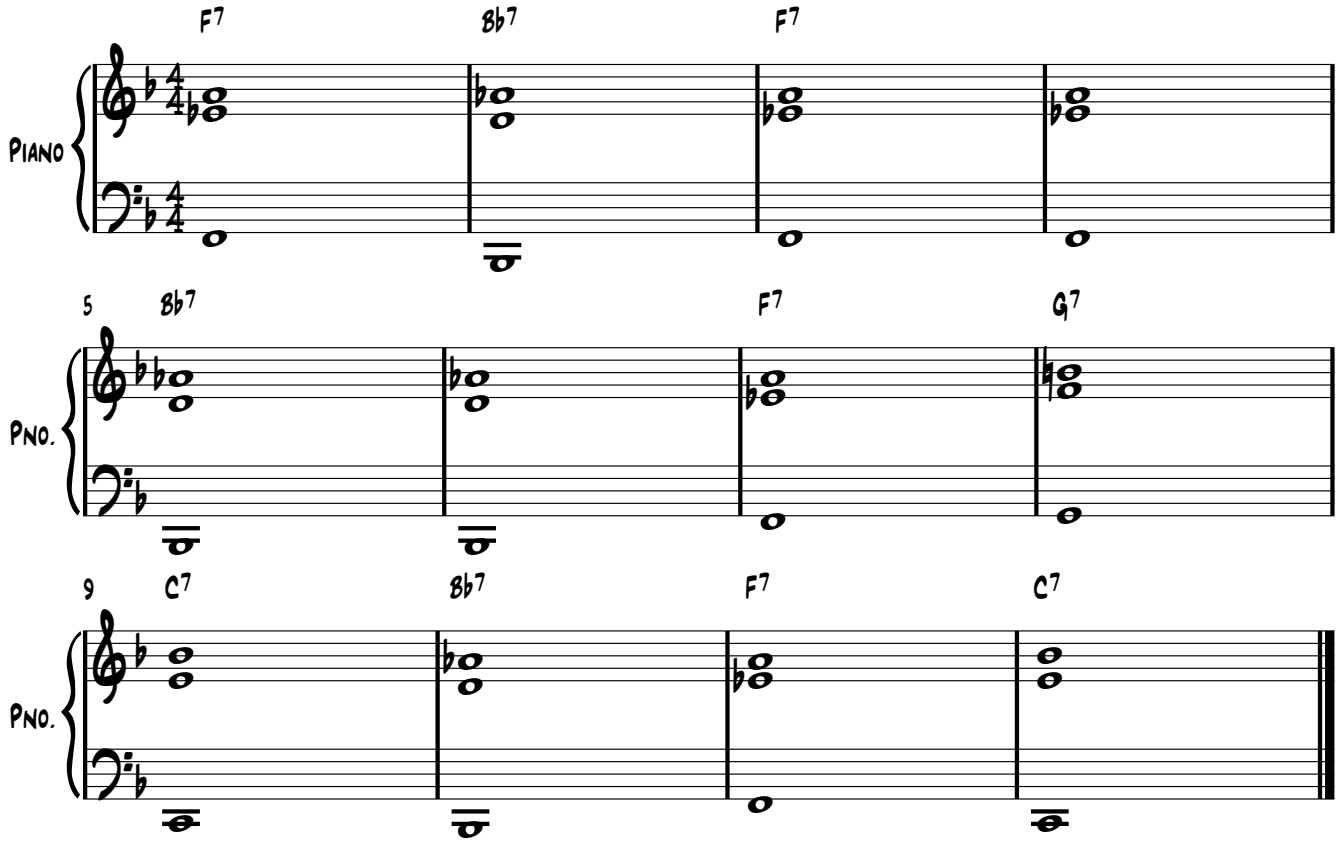

Guide Tone Voicings Plus One

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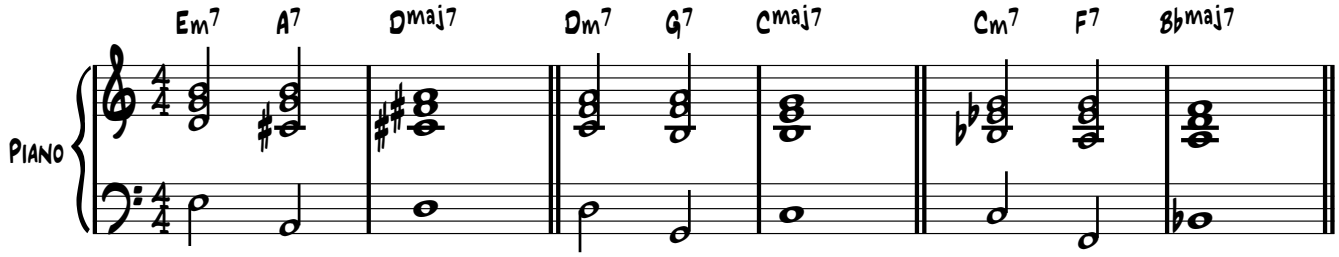

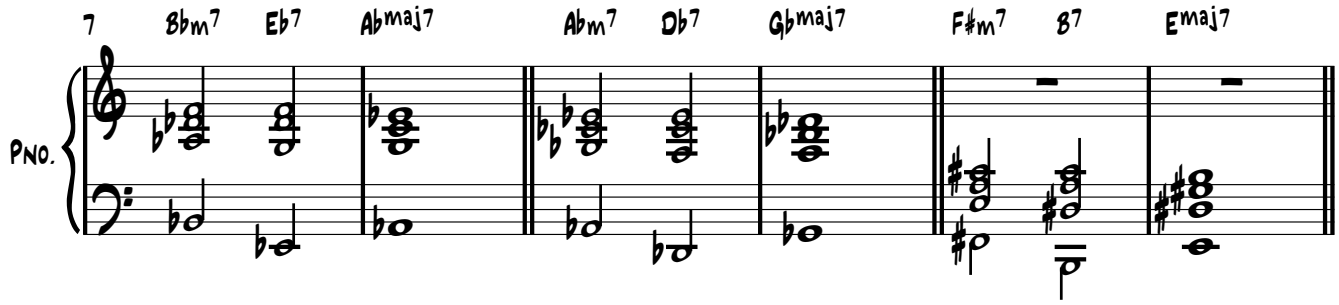

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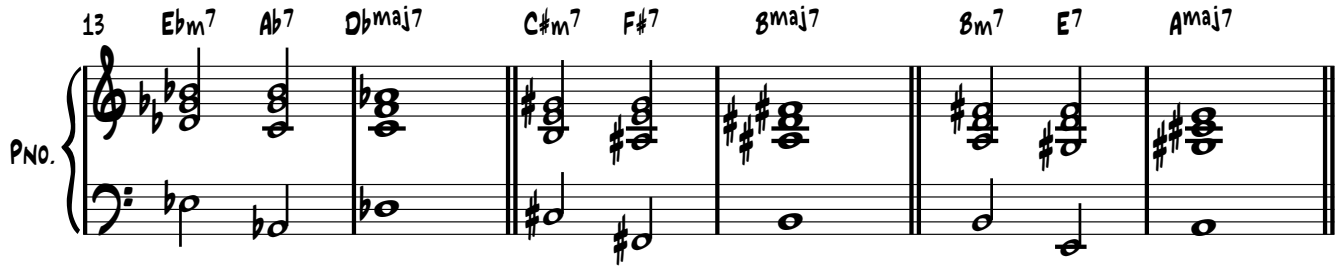

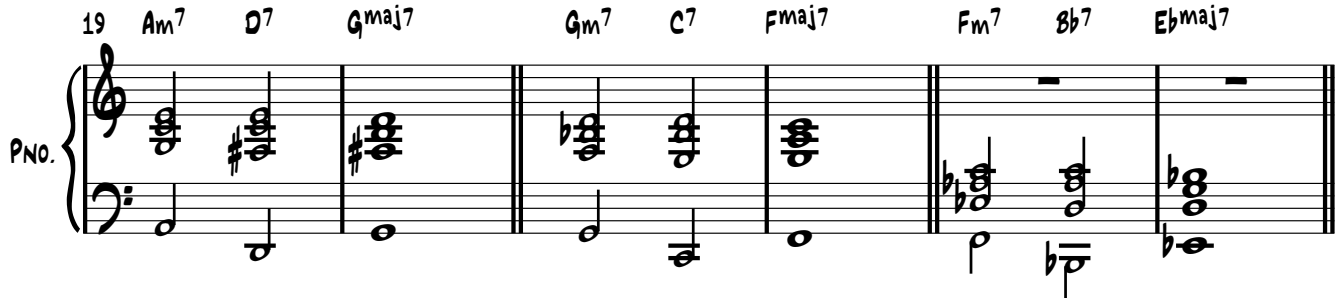

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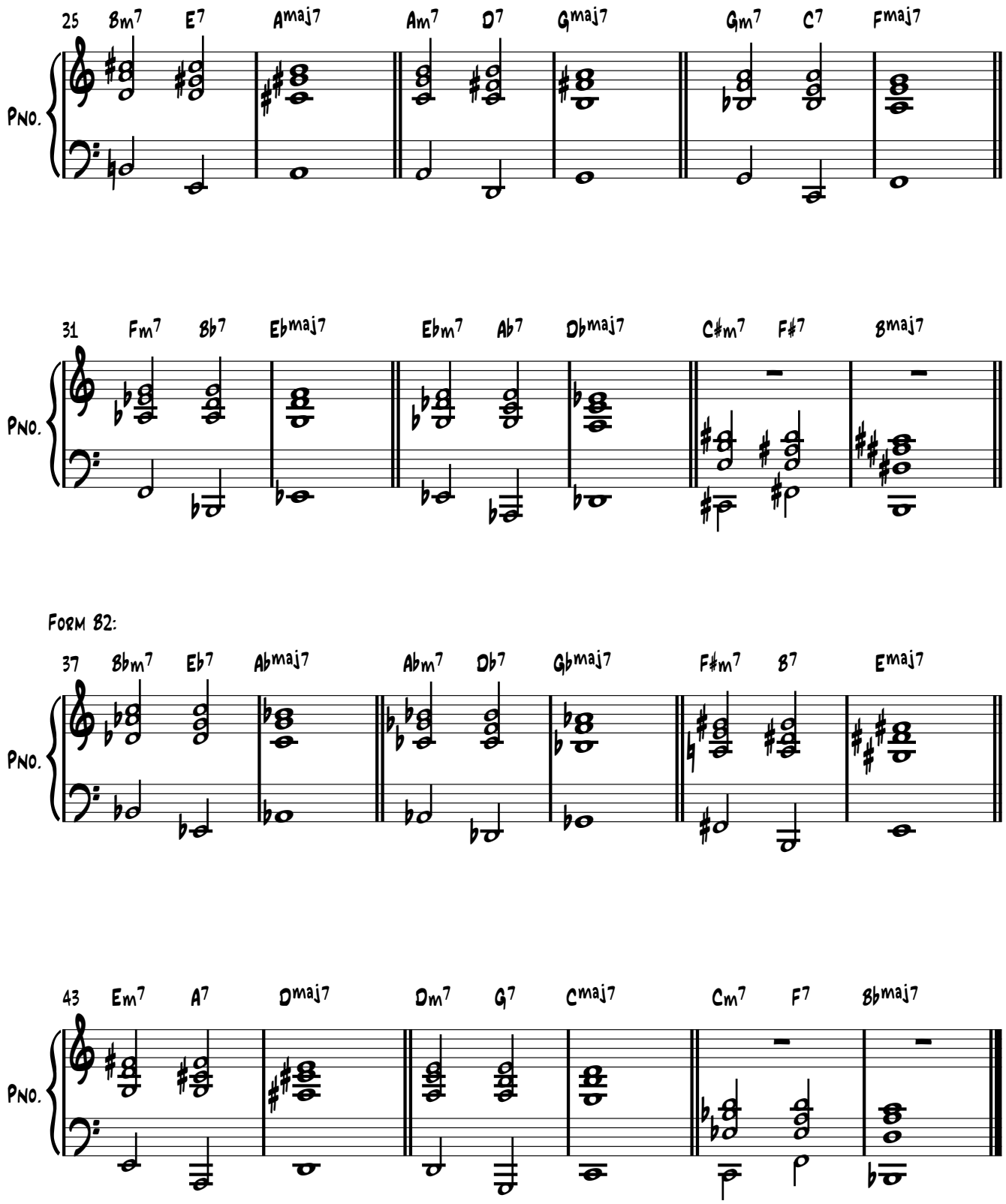

Form B2:

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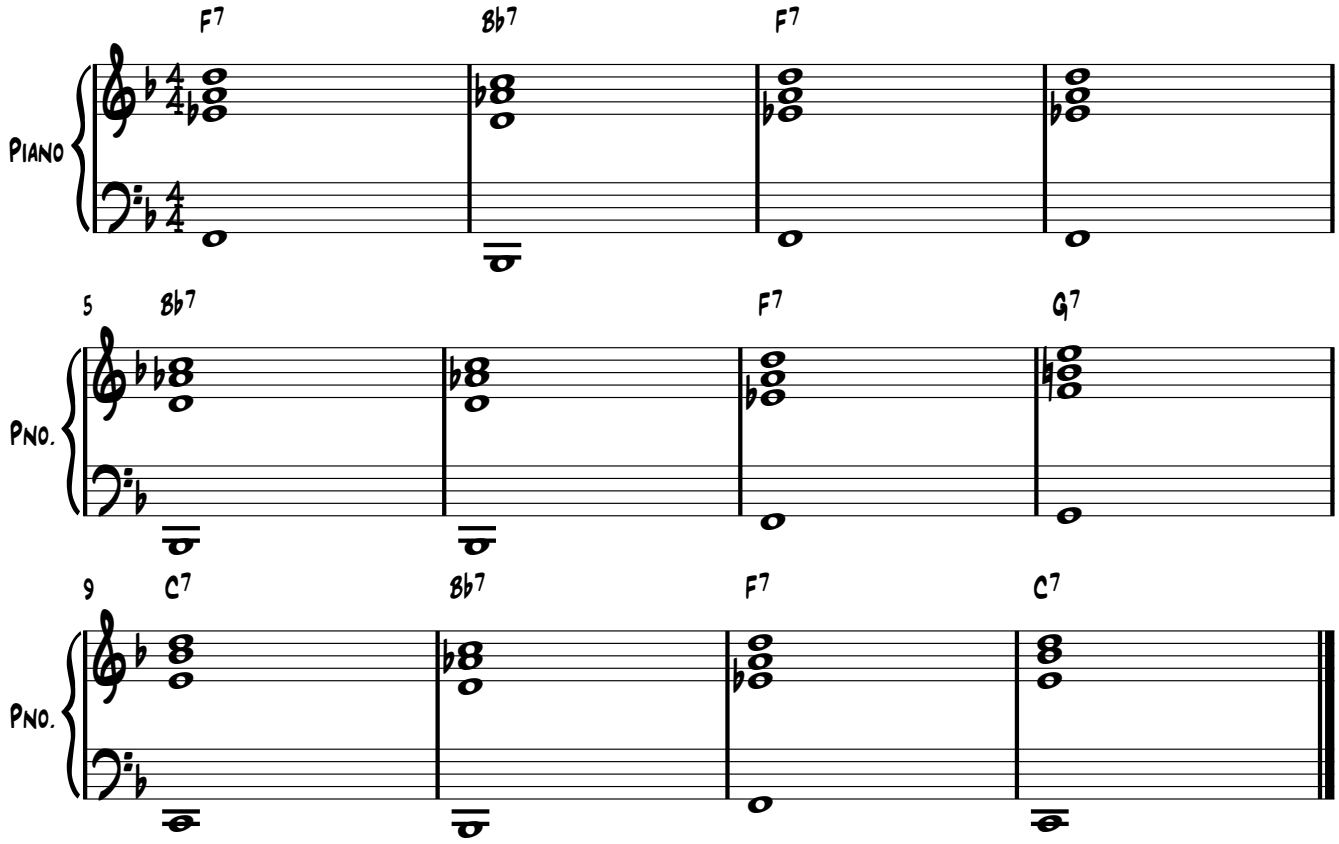

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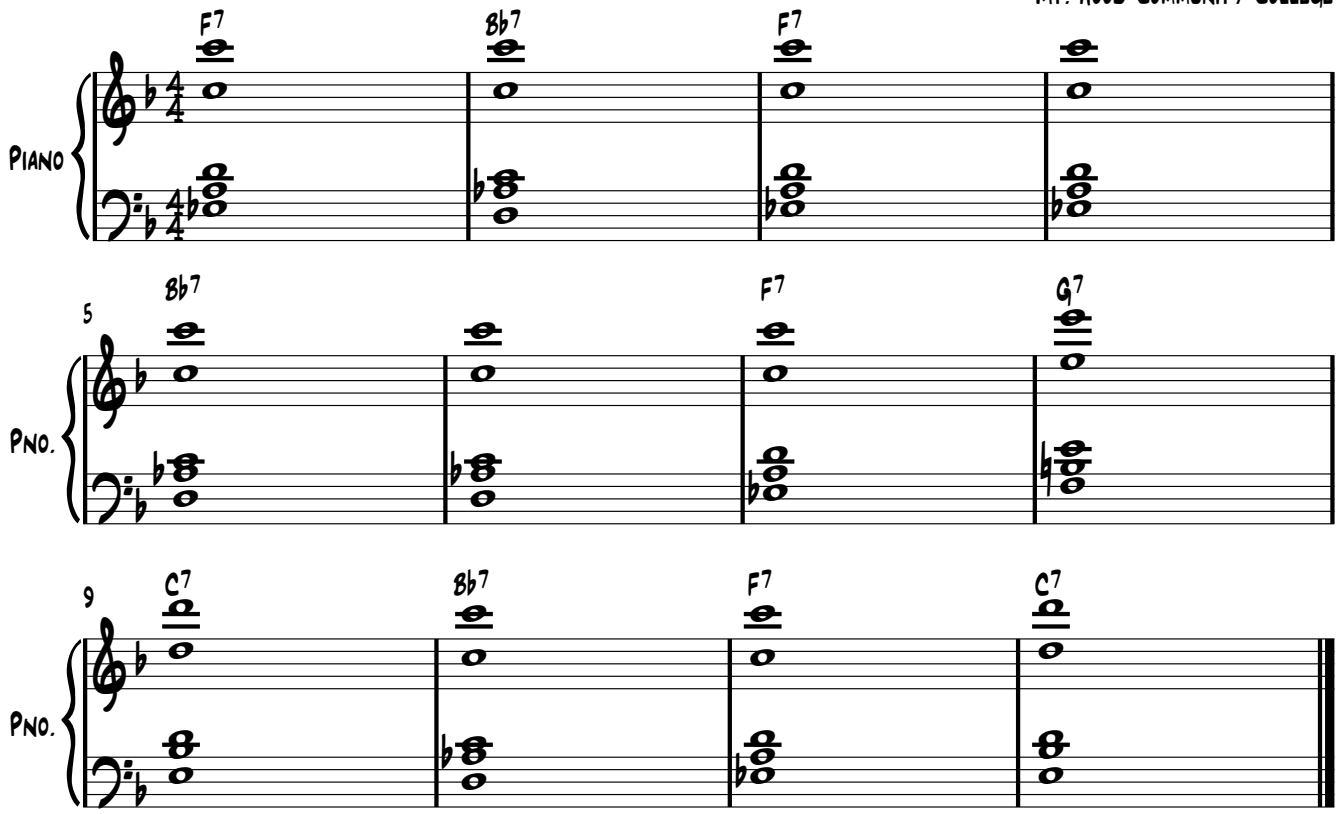

Four-Note Minor Voicings

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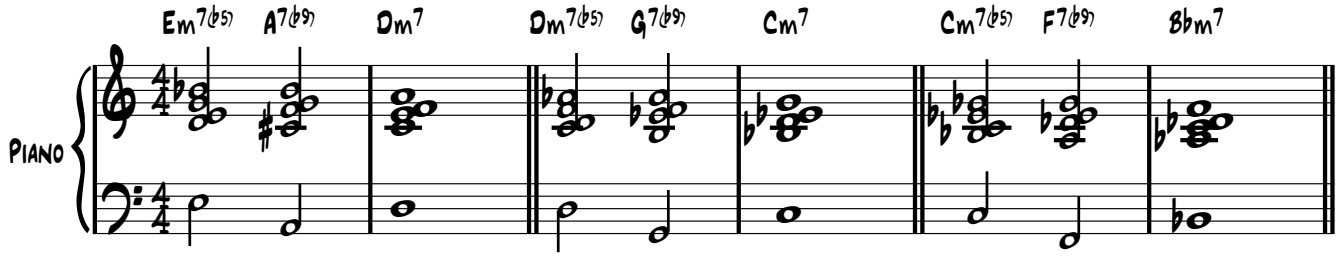
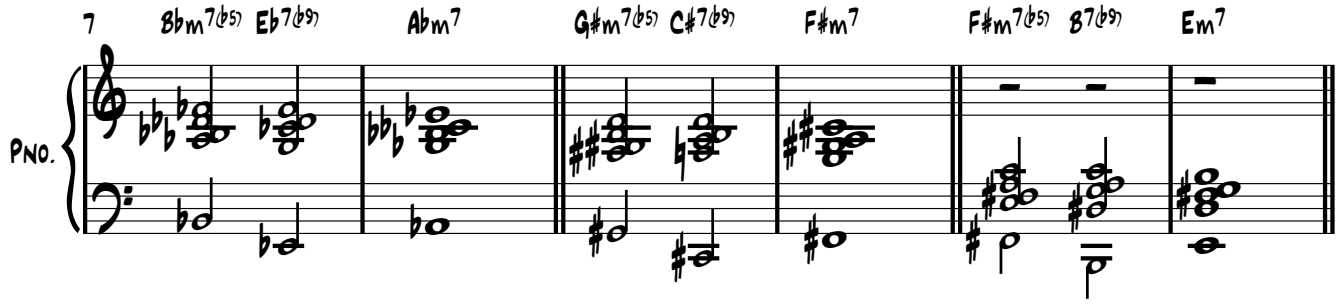
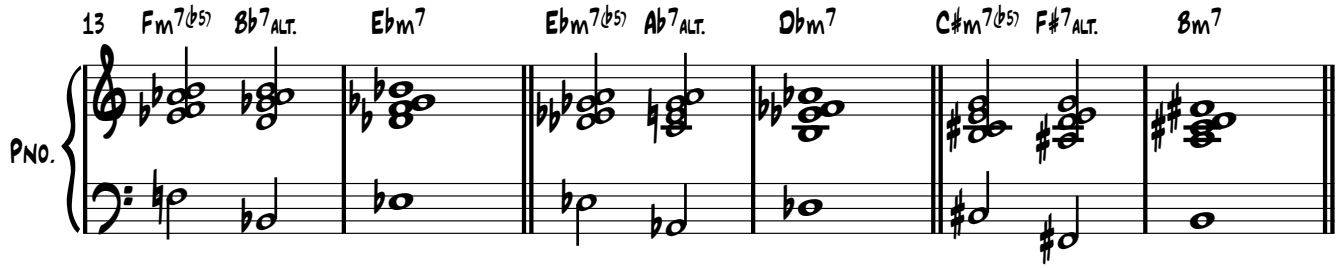
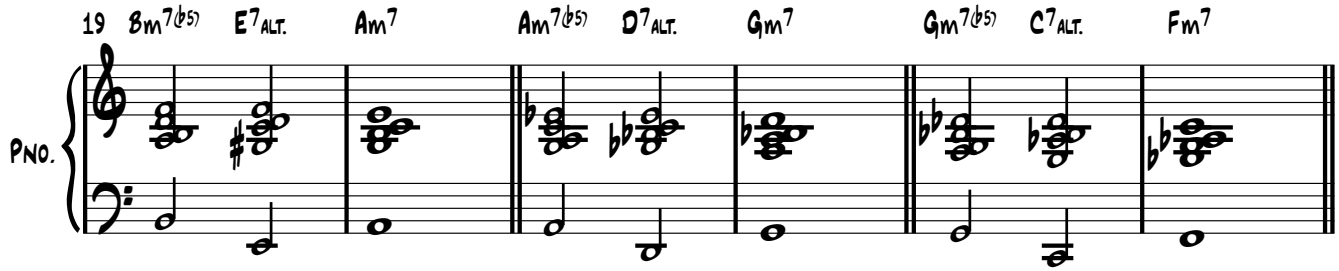




Form A2:





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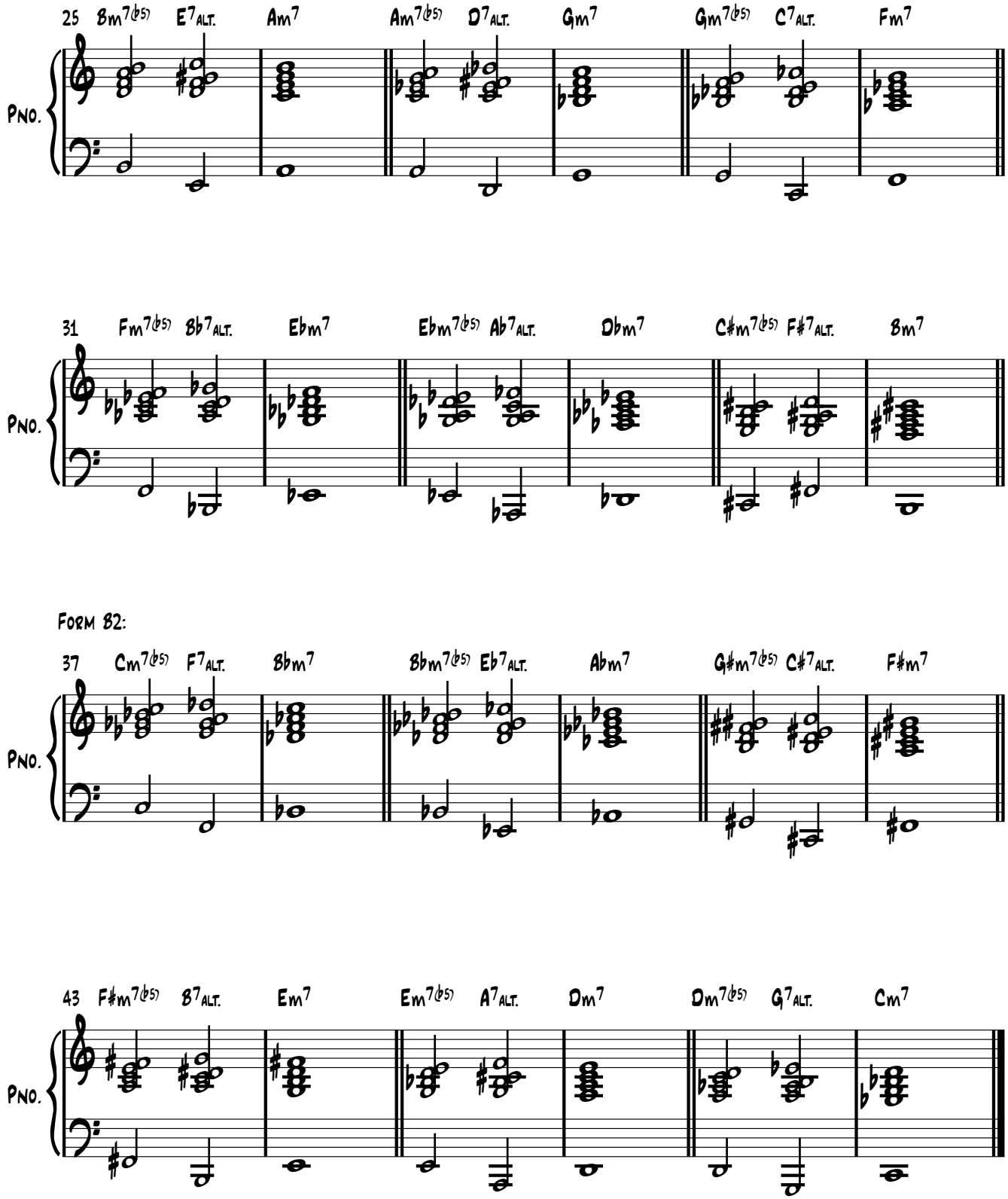


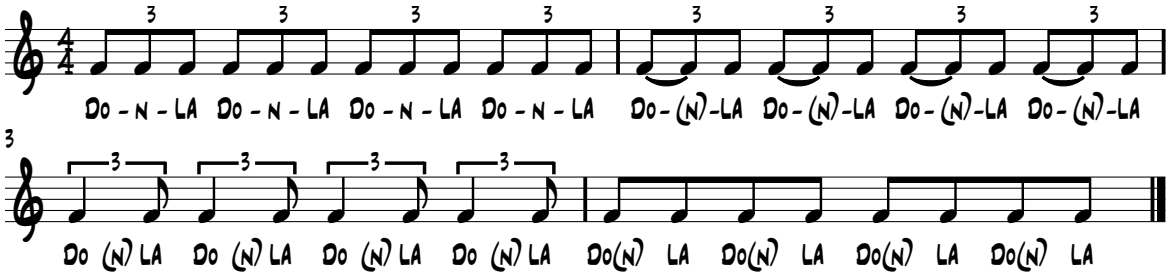
Form B2:

COMPING 101

- Compliment or Accompany
- The goal is to provide a harmonic and rhythmic counterpart that creatively supports the other instrumentalists.
- The pianist helps to create the foundational groove for the band.
- Comping patterns should represent the subdivision of the groove (triplets, swung/straight 8th notes, etc.) like a drum fill
- Generally, all notes of the chord should sound together unless rolling/arpeggiating a chord in a ballad, etc.

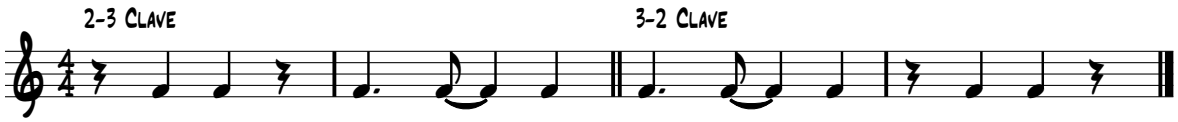
STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS: SWING

- The swing groove is established by a triplet subdivision.
- “LA” is the lift where the syncopation occurs. The bass player and comping instruments thrive on the lift!



STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS: LATIN

- Straight/Even 8th note subdivision
- Comping patterns should be short and percussive
- Afro-Cuban grooves should revolve around the 2-3 or 3-2 Son Clave



JAZZ PIANO BASICS - DAN DAVEY

4 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COMPING

1. Play long, sustained chords
2. Play same/similar rhythms to another section/instrument
3. Play in the holes/spaces
4. Play a combination of 1-3 (*this is comping!)

KNOWING THE PIANIST'S ROLE

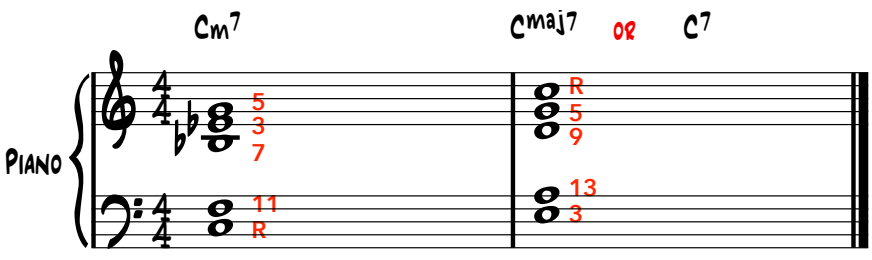
- Listen and groove with the bass and ride/hi-hat
- Communicate with soloists (requires listening!)
- Support the band and fill holes where appropriate
- Not letting the harmonic accompaniment become muddy or heavy! … especially when other comping instruments are concerned
- Not all comping instruments can "talk" at the same time without yielding to each other - jazz is a conversation!
- Piano/Guitar relationships - coordinate comping for each section of the chart. One instrument can be more rhythmic while the other is more sustained. One can lay out while the other plays. Director can coordinate or empower the students to make these artistic decisions.

UPPER STRUCTURES

- Playing a triad over your foundational chord can supply tensions and alterations to chords.
- Left hand can play the 2 or 3-note voicings from above
- Right hand plays an available triad in any inversion.
- Different triads give different colors and moods.

VOICINGS IN 4THS

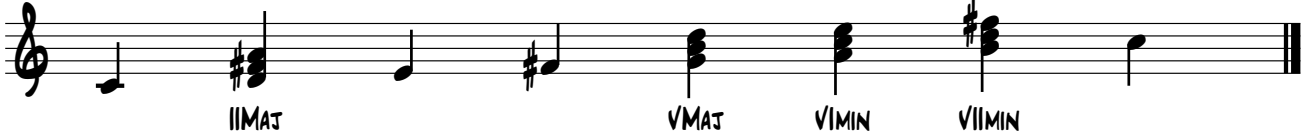
- More modern, open sound from players like McCoy Tyner and Chick Chorea
- Minor Chords: build up from the Root in 4th with a 3rd on top
- Major/Dominant Chords: build up from the 3rd in 4ths



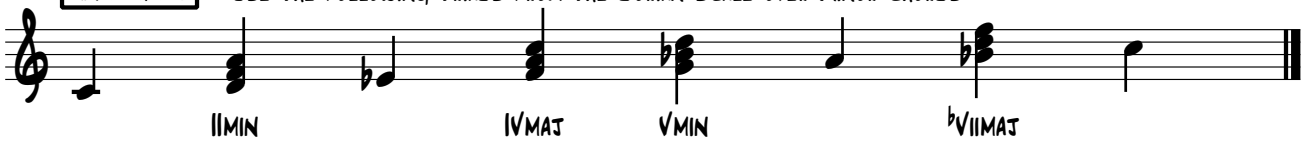
Upper Structure Triads

Dan Davey
Mt. Hood Community College

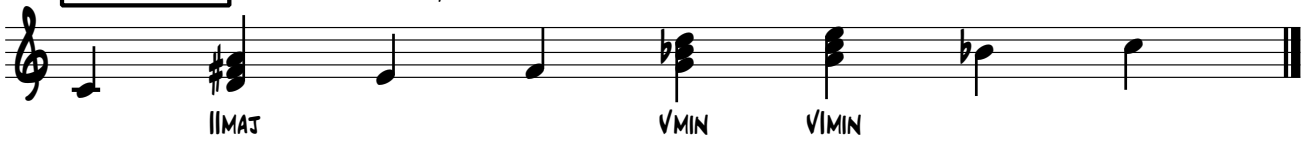
Major Chords Use the following triads from the Lydian Scale over Major Chords



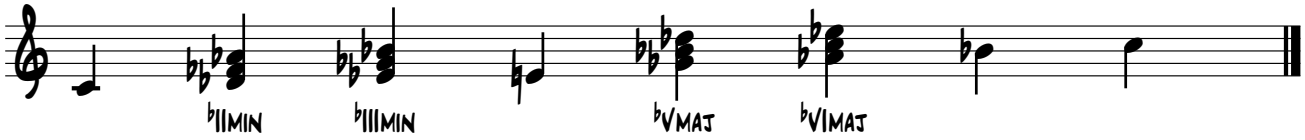
Minor Chords Use the following triads from the Dorian Scale over Minor Chords



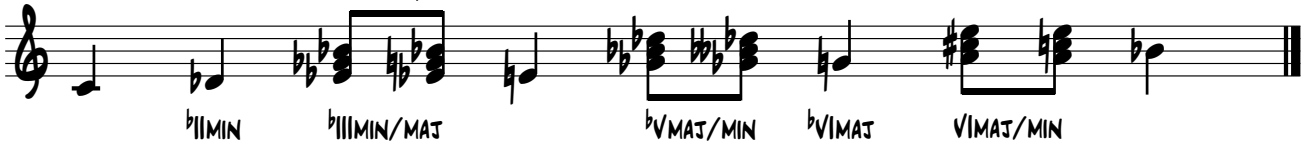
Dominant Chords Use the following triads from the Lydian ♭7 Scale over Dominant Chords



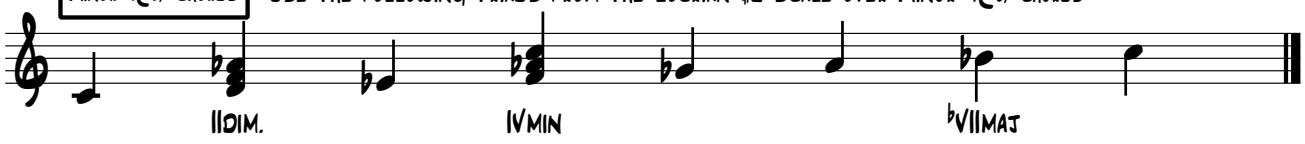
Use the following triads from the Altered Scale over Dominant Chords for more color



Use the following triads from the Diminished Scale over Dominant Chords for even more color

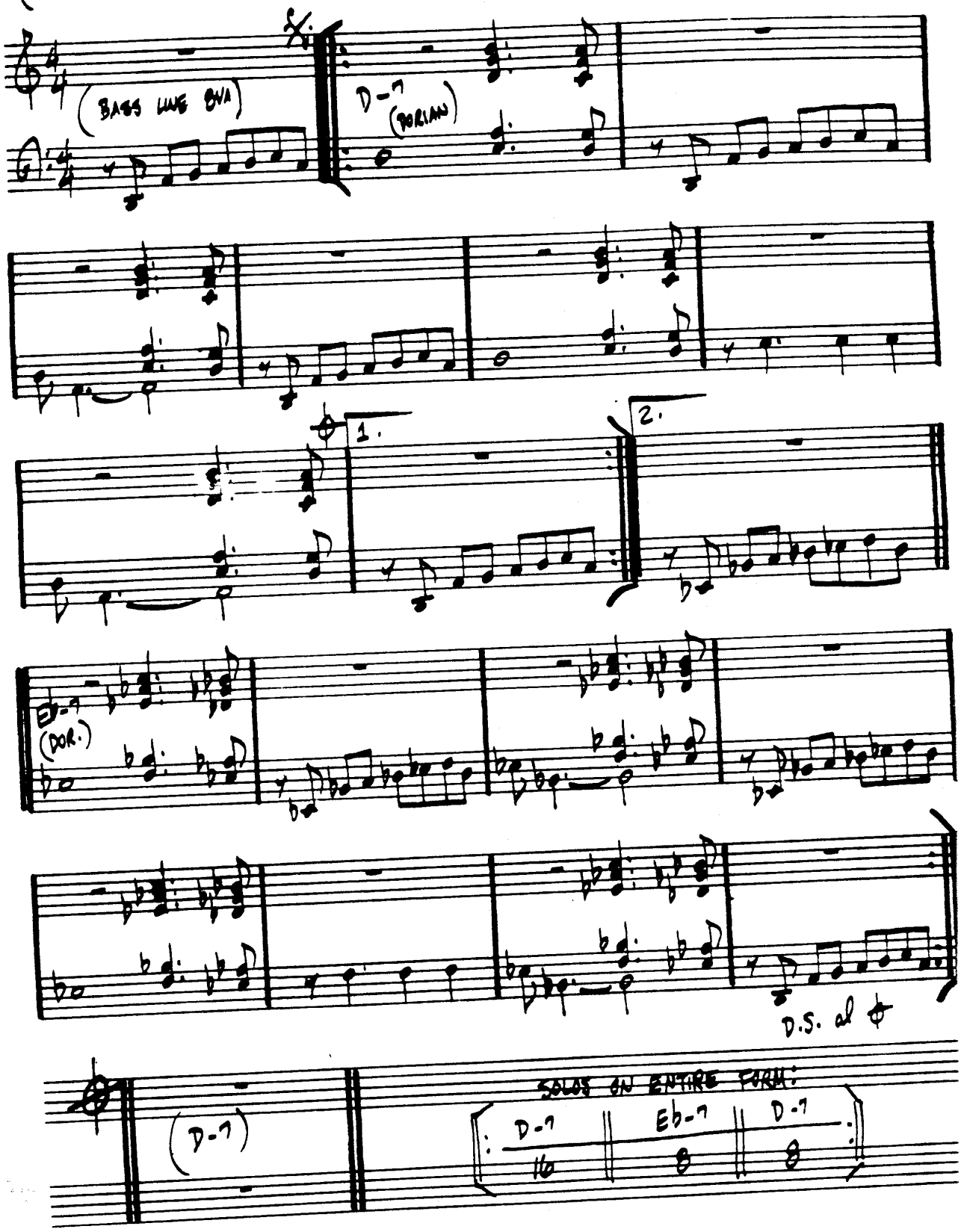


Minor 7(♭5) Chords Use the following triads from the Locrian #2 Scale over Minor 7(♭5) Chords



SO WHAT

— MILES DAVIS



Appendix H: RECOMMENDED LISTENING

One representative recording is selected for each of the following important pianists in both trio and larger group settings. Listen to trio recordings to study piano arrangements of tunes; listen to larger groups to study comping. Also study the Jamey Aebersold Play-A-Long recordings for comping ideas.

Trio Recordings :

Monty Alexander, *Facets*, CJ108
Kenny Barron, *Green Chimneys*, Criss Cross 1008
Chick Corea, *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*, Blue Note 90055
Bill Evans, *Sunday at The Village Vanguard*, OJCCD-140-2
Tommy Flanagan, *Eclypso*, Enja 2088
Red Garland, *Red Garland's Piano*, OJC473
Barry Harris, *Barry Harris At The Jazz Workshop*, Riverside 326
Gene Harris with the Ray Brown Trio, *Bam Bam Bam*, Concord Jazz-375
Fred Hersch, *Sarabande*, Sunnyside 1024
Ahmad Jamal, *But Not For Me*, MCA 9108
Keith Jarrett, *Standards Live*, Polygram 827
Hank Jones, *The Oracle*, Emarcy 846-376
Mulgrew Miller, *Keys to the City*, LCD 1507
Thelonius Monk, *Monk Plays Duke Ellington*, OJC-024
Tete Montoliu, *Catalonian Fire*, Steeplechase 1017
Phineas Newborn Jr., *A World of Piano*, OJC-175
Oscar Peterson, *Night Train*, Polygram 821-724
Bud Powell, *The Genius of Bud Powell*, Polygram 827-901
Horace Silver, *The Horace Silver Trio*, Blue Note 1520
McCoy Tyner, *Plays Ellington*, Impulse 79
Cedar Walton, *Firm Roots*, Muse 5069

Quartet or larger group recordings:

Monty Alexander with Ernestine Anderson, *Never Make Your Move Too Soon*, Concord Jazz CJ-147
Kenny Barron, with Joe Henderson, *The Kicker*, OJC-465
Sonny Clark, *Cool Struttin'*, Blue Note 46513
Chick Corea, *Inner Space*, Atlantic 305
Kenny Drew with John Coltrane, *Blue Trane*, Blue Note 81577
Bill Evans with Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*, Columbia 40579
Red Garland with Miles Davis, *Milestones*, Columbia 40837
Herbie Hancock with Miles Davis, *My Funny Valentine*, Columbia 48821
Herbie Hancock with Wayne Shorter, *Speak No Evil*, Blue Note 84194
Barry Harris with Lee Morgan, *The Sidewinder*, Blue Note 4157
Hank Jones with Cannonball Adderley, *Somethin' Else*, Blue Note 1595
Wynton Kelly with Miles Davis, *Some Day My Prince Will Come*, Columbia 40947
Horace Silver, *Song For My Father*, Blue Note 84185
Bobby Timmons with Art Blakey, *Moanin'*, Blue Note 46516
McCoy Tyner, *The Real McCoy*, Blue Note 84264
McCoy Tyner with John Coltrane, *My Favorite Things*, Atlantic 1361
Cedar Walton with Joe Henderson, *Mode For Joe*, Blue Note 84227

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QUICK WAY TO SOUND MORE ADVANCED

- Any voicing can be moved up or down chromatically or diatonically to make a stagnant chord progression more interesting.

JAZZ PIANO RESOURCES

- Jazz Piano Online: http://www.jazzpianoonline.com
- “Jazz Keyboard Harmony” A Practical Voicing Method for all Musicians by Phil DeGreg
- “Jazz Piano Voicing Skills” A Method for Individual or Class Study by Dan Haerle
- “101 Montunos” by Rebeca Mauleon-Santana

PLEASE CONTACT ME!

Dan Davey
Director of Jazz Studies
Mt. Hood Community College

daniel.davey@mhcc.edu
503-491-7010

www.danieldavey.net