SOLO JAZZ PIANO

Learn more at Berklee*music.com*

CD Included

BERKLEE PRES

Solo Jazz Piano

The Linear Approach

Neil Olmstead

Contents

CD Tracks

Foreword

For the improvising pianist, a deep understanding of root, bass, and inversional harmonic relationships is absolutely essential. We benefit by understanding harmonic relationships and the strong implications and tonal gravity of the root structure and its generated harmonic overtones. With considerable alacrity, Neil Olmstead's fine work demonstrates and details a comprehensive palette and view of tonal harmony. He expounds upon this harmonic foundation with bass-line movements of nearly every possible style and level of difficulty, as well as melodic intricacy.

This volume offers the beginning improviser a step-by-step approach to improvising in a solo jazz context. It is equally valuable to the more advanced thinker who already has achieved some knowledge of chord changes, progressions of many kinds, and standard repertory. Much of Olmstead's fascinating presentation is immediately within reach of any pianist with a basic technique. Some materials will require more practice—particularly in regards to piano technique and the understanding of the tonal possibilities (e.g., pedal point and reharmonization) inherent in the piano's seemingly endless sonic potential. But any pianist will benefit by the journey that Olmstead has set forth.

An extremely important overall feature of Olmstead's work is the assertion of how one's melodic-linear language is enriched and extended by way of understanding bass-line movement on the keyboard. These concepts can be translated to other genres, such as contrabass, or used as a compositional tool for orchestration and tonal development on an even larger scale. Solo piano improvisation is the model, but it is also just the beginning.

With this understanding, and the clear manner in which Olmstead lays out his materials and avoids lengthy verbal descriptions, neologisms, and the like, the sky *is* the limit. The serious student of these materials cannot help but to be inspired and stimulated towards a deeper and deeper understanding. The tonal-harmonic universe, the mysteries of melodic development, and the essential concepts of composition are all filtered through the development of the bass-line phenomena. It is wonderfully presented in this extensive treatise on solo jazz improvisation.

William Thomas McKinley

William Thomas McKinley is a composer, pianist and educator who has performed with and/or written for Gary Burton, Eddie Gomez, Miroslav Vitous, Stan Getz, Joe Lovano, John Scofield, Roy Haynes, and many others. He lives on the North Shore of Massachusetts with his wife Marlene.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the following people for their valued contributions to this effort.

Debbie Cavalier, Director of Content for Berklee Media, for her kind and inspired encouragement.

Jonathan Feist, Senior Writer/Editor of Berklee Press, for his consistently detailed analysis and organization of content.

The staff at Berklee Press for their work in preparing the manuscript.

Sandy Letendre for her photographic expertise.

Peter Kontrimas for his artistic approach and technical expertise in recording the CD.

Jean McKenna O'Donnell and Scott McKenzie for their resources on Dave McKenna.

William Thomas McKinley for his thoughtful review and foreword.

My students of *Contrapuntal Jazz Improvisation for Pianists* for their detailed transcriptions and performances of this music.

Lennie Tristano for his unrelenting musical conviction and integrity, especially on his performance of "C Minor Complex," the improvisation that inspired this journey.

Dave McKenna for his joyful deep swing on hundreds of tunes that so encouraged me and my students to realize, "It can be done!"

And my wife, Donna Olmstead, for all her support and patience throughout this endeavor.

Introduction

Contrapuntal Jazz Improvisation

Contrapuntal jazz improvisation means improvising simultaneous lines of music within a jazz context. Typically, it is comprised of a bass line in the left hand and either a melody or improvised line in the right hand. This can be done within a jazz tune over chord changes or as a pure free-flowing improvisation devoid of specific form. In either case, it is a linear texture with wonderful possibilities in all manner of rhythm, harmony, and counterpoint.

History

Lennie Tristano was the groundbreaking pianist of this style with his *Descent Into the Maelstrom* (1952) and *The New Tristano* (1962) LPs. The latter recording contains superb performances of Lennie playing jazz standards as well as free-form improvisations. Subsequent recordings include *Concert in Copenhagen* of 1965 and numerous reissued tracks on various CDs. Lennie's musical character is rhythmically unique and intellectually complex, and it proved to be a driving force in the development of jazz.

The Boston pianist Dave McKenna could be considered the rhythmic antithesis of Lennie Tristano. His solo piano texture is also essentially contrapuntal, but with a more traditional swing. Many of Dave's solo and duo recordings contain wonderful examples of walking bass lines with deep-swinging, hard-driving right-hand improvisations rooted in the bebop tradition. McKenna's solo and duo piano discography is extensive and rooted in this tradition of playing.

Other pianists that have recorded in this contrapuntal style include Alan Broadbent, Connie Crothers (both students of Tristano's), Tete Monteliu, Kenny Baron, and Diana Krall. More rarely, we also find recordings of Oscar Peterson and Bill Evans playing great bass lines in solo and duo settings.

More evident today is the use of contrapuntal improvisation in ensemble settings. Pianists Brad Melhdau, Ken Werner, and Keith Jarrett are playing clear independent lower lines in the left hand that are set against traditional upper-voice improvised lines.

Appendix B. "Discography" lists some classic recordings in this style, and I encourage you to listen to them while studying these techniques.

The Text

This approach to teaching contrapuntal jazz piano has been refined over many years, teaching hundreds of pianists at Berklee College of Music. *Solo Jazz Piano* codifies this method. Each chapter includes a series of steps that will help develop the language needed to improvise contrapuntally. Left-hand vocabulary, right-hand chords, independence exercises, and ideas on arranging and improvisation are all described in detail. Part I reviews chord interpretation. Part II begins the contrapuntal journey. Starting with half-note bass lines, you will develop your sense of rhythmic independence and flexibility, and then move onto more sophisticated walking bass lines. Part III topics include left-hand motivic embellishment, pedal point, multi-voice improvisation, metric modulation, and motivic development.

Though the text touches on harmony, comping, solo development, and other techniques of improvisation, the focus is on contrapuntal techniques for the solo pianist.

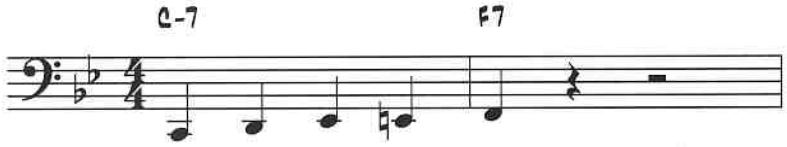
How to Use This Book

Each chapter begins with a discussion of some theory or technique for improvising. These are supported by practice exercises, such as the *arrow sheets*, which will guide you through the thought process of using the technique. The exercises are followed by tunes, which are based on chord progressions of jazz standards. These tunes are presented in two different ways. *Etudes* are through-composed studies, based on various jazz standards. Every note is notated, and they serve as complete models for how the concepts presented earlier can be used. *Lead sheets* present only the melody and chord changes, and are more representative of what jazz players actually read from. You should create your own bass line, comping part, improvisation, and arrangement to these tunes, again, using the techniques and ideas discussed in the chapter. The accompaning CD provides examples of how some of the lead sheets might be interpreted. I encourage you to research the original tunes as well.

The Motives

Bass-line *motives* (short melodic ideas) are the prime source of vocabulary for the left hand. They originate from frequently used melodic shapes of the jazz tradition. They are not intellectually challenging; they are *functional,* allowing the bass line to move logically from chord to chord without distracting the performer from his creative right-hand improvisations. These motives should be memorized in much the same manner as you would memorize chord voicings, thereby always having something "in your fingers" to play throughout the harmonic progression of the tune.

When you study these lines, you may wonder, for example, why is this particular motive recommended:



. . . when this one could be used?

They are both valid musical ways of getting from the C-7 to the F7 chord. However, the more subtle, less patternistic shape of the first motive is preferred because the line can then be functional without sounding sequential, if the motive is repeated.

Specific methods of developing these motives and creating more diverse and interesting left-hand lines are introduced gradually.

How Piano Bass Lines Differ from String Bass Lines

Piano bass lines differ from string bass lines in that the clarity of the piano tone does not lend itself immediately to all the subtleties of the traditional bass instruments. Consequently, the bass motives discussed in this method are slightly different than those of a bass method. Where a bassist can get away with playing a large number of arpeggios, for example, the arpeggiated bass line on the piano can easily sound overdone and uninteresting, and possibly more "Chopinesque" than jazz oriented.

The Range

Additionally, the range of the bass line is important. The string bass sounds an octave lower than written and has an appropriate tone in almost all octaves. However, the piano bass line can easily sound too high. Hence, I encourage you to play bass lines that are lower than what you may initially feel is natural. This depth of sound is important for the right-hand line as well; the tenor range on the piano will fill in the overtones and significantly enhance the texture when only two voices are sounding. Both Lennie Tristano and Dave McKenna play many of their solos in this low, tenor range, sometimes never reaching the C above middle C.

Necessary Basics

Student of these concepts will gain greater confidence and ease in contrapuntal improvisation if they have:

- the ability to read grand-staff piano scores (see the etudes);
- a basic understanding of jazz chord structure and nomenclature (see chapter 1);
- a general aural concept of bebop piano style (see appendix B);
- a beginning knowledge of the repertoire;
- a functional knowledge of jazz terminology, scales, and modes;
- and most importantly, a strong desire to enhance and explore the contrapuntal possibilities of solo jazz piano technique.

Enjoy this book. I hope that it inspires you to be more creative in your own soloing.

PART I. Chords

Chord theory and its musical application lie at the heart of jazz. Chords provide the harmonic backdrop to all jazz standards and the harmonic framework for improvisation. It is therefore of paramount importance for students of jazz to learn chord structure and vocabulary thoroughly.

The Pianist's Role

In jazz, the pianist's role is to provide the tune's harmonic basis by playing the "changes" (chords) behind a soloist or his own solos. Pianists must have a variety of "voicings" (chord note arrangements) at their disposal.

Part I explores many common chord voicings and progressions found in jazz tunes. It also discusses aspects of "voice leading" through the changes, which enables your chords to have a linear quality.

Practice all these early exercises thoroughly. They will build your fluency in the harmonic language of jazz, and help you become a well-versed accompanist and an inspired soloist.

Chapter 1. Fundamentals of Chord Theory

Lead Sheet Basics

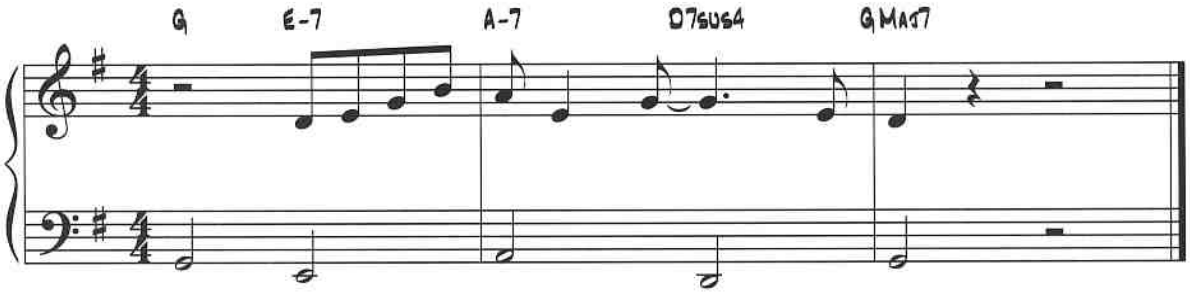
THEORY

Jazz pianists generally read from lead sheets. A lead sheet just has the melody and chord symbols. It is the pianist's job to interpret the lead sheet, creating a bass part, chords, melody, arrangement, rhythmic feel, and so on.

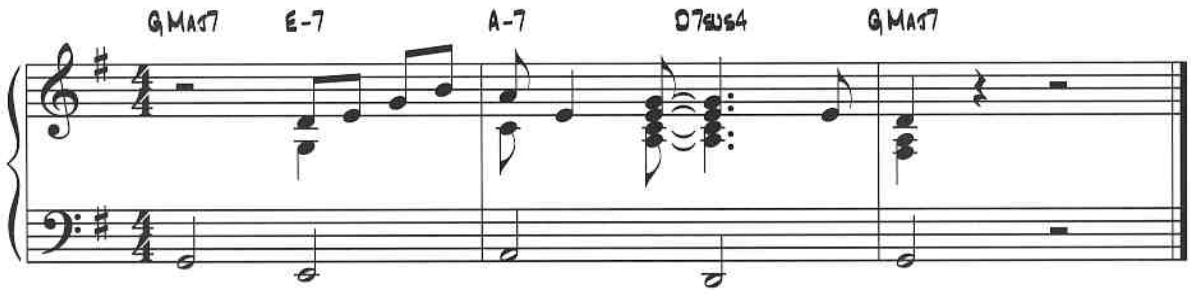
Follow this approach whenever you practice a lead sheet.

1. **Play just the melody.** Below is an example of lead sheet notation. When you use a lead sheet to create your own arrangement, begin by playing the melody alone.

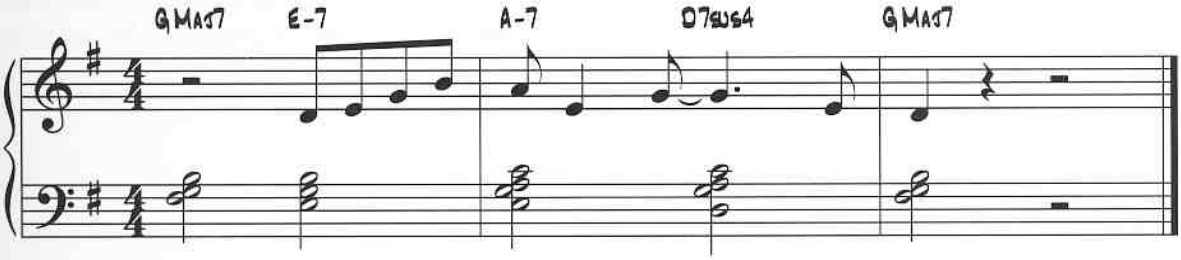
2. **Play the melody and a simple bass part.** Once you can play the melody easily, add a simple bass line. The simplest bass line to play is the chord root, played once, held until the next chord symbol.



3. **Play the melody, bass, and inner chord notes.** Harmonize the melody by adding chord tones. This gives the melody a fuller sound and expresses more of the chord quality.



4. **Play the melody over chords.** While the right hand plays the melody, the left hand plays chords.



This approach will give you a complete sense of the melody and harmony, and it will help prepare you to create your own arrangement and improvisation of the tune. We will study techniques for developing lead sheets throughout this book.

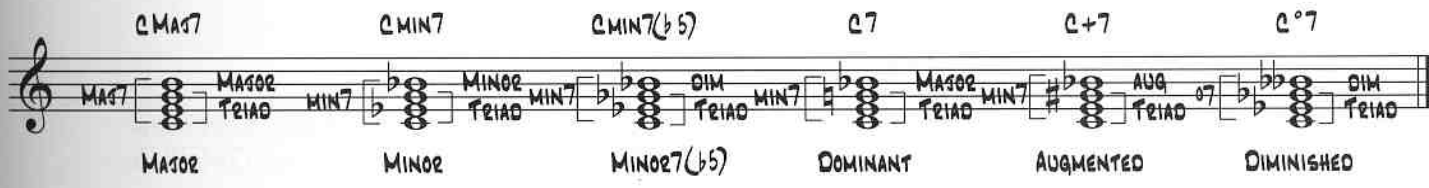
Interpreting Chord Symbols

To learn a tune from a lead sheet, you must know the chords. Most jazz harmonies are based on seventh chords. Though seventh-chord symbols are not standardized, they all have three basic kinds of information. First, a letter indicates the chord root. Second, if the basic triad is not major, then a symbol follows that indicates the chord quality and the type of seventh used. Third, numerals (4, 6, 9, 11, and 13) in the chord symbol indicate notes at intervals away from the root.

The following chart shows some common notation and composition for seventh chords.

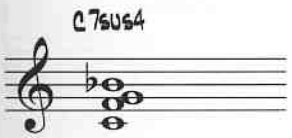
Quality	Abbreviation	Symbol	Example	Structure
Major	Maj	Ma, Maj	CMaj7	Maj triad/Maj 7
Minor	min	–, mi, min	C–7	min triad/min 7
Minor 7 flat-5	min7(♭5)	–7(♭5), min7(♭5)	C–7(♭5)	dim triad/min 7
Dominant	dom	7	C7	Maj triad/min 7
Augmented	aug	+	C+7	aug triad/min 7
Diminished	dim	°	C°7	dim triad/dim 7

Play the following *chord voicings* (arrangement of chord notes), observing the chord symbols.

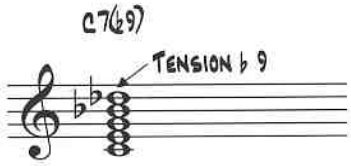


Additional Notes on Chords

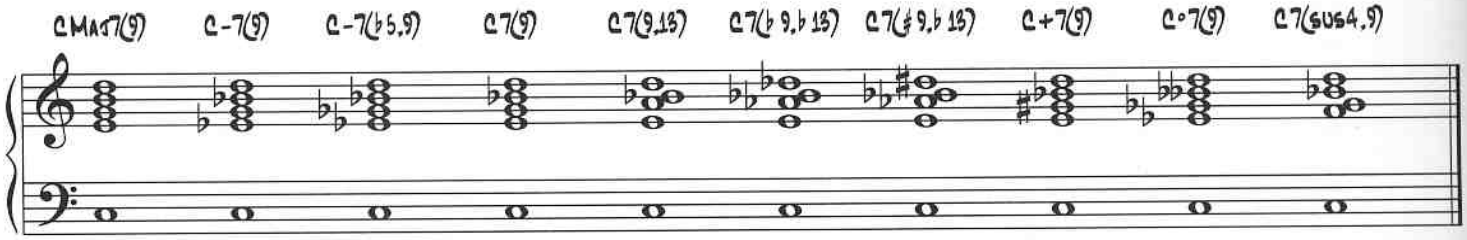
On dominant chord symbols, there may be a "4," indicating a suspended fourth. With these chords, the chord's third is replaced with the fourth, as in C7sus4.



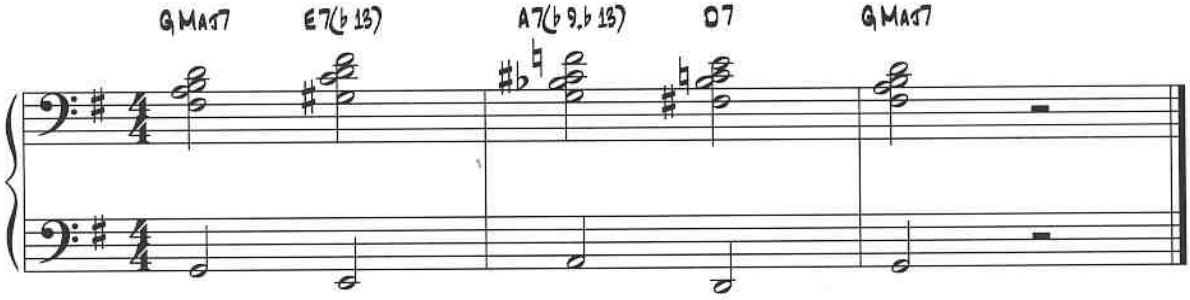
Some chords include the numbers 9, 11, and/or 13, which indicate additional tones to the seventh chord. The numbers represent intervals from the chord root. These notes are called *tensions* (short for "extensions"), and are often written in parentheses following the 7, as in CMaj7(9). On dominant chords, they may be preceded by a sharp or flat, indicating that they are *altered* notes, such as C7(♭9).



Play the following chord voicings, observing the tensions used. Note that the 9 replaces the root in the right-hand chords. The 13 replaces the 5 on the dominant chords. This technique is discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

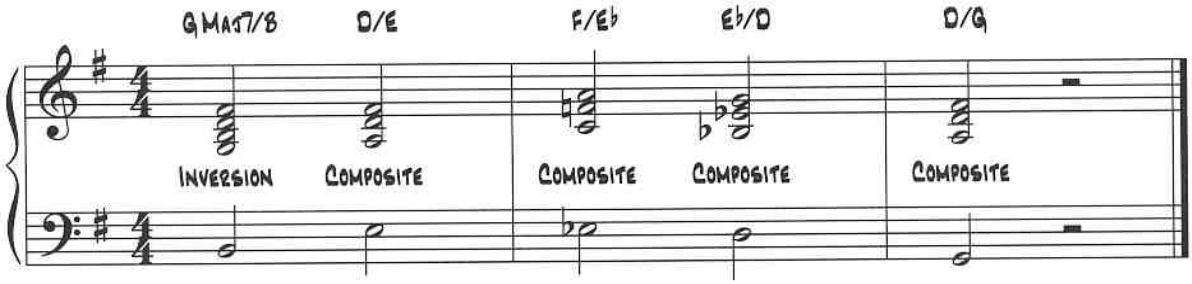


This phrase includes three dominant seventh chords in common ways that they may be interpreted.



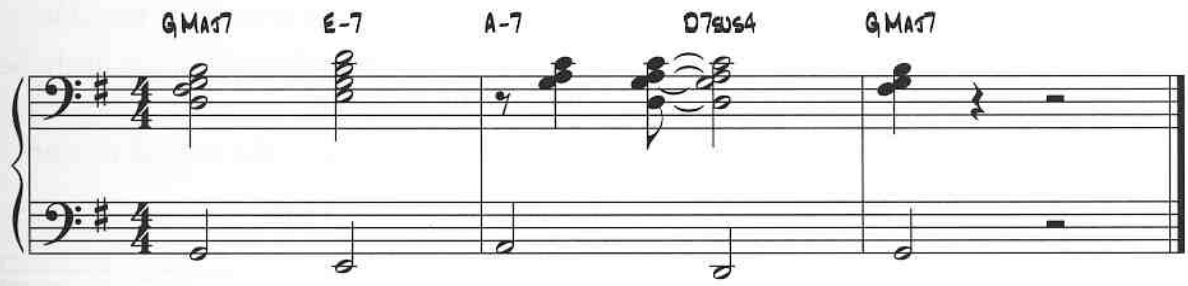
"Slash" Chord Symbols and Inversions

Two chord symbols separated by a slash (/) indicate a *composite* chord or an *inverted* chord. The letter after the slash indicates the bass note. For example, the GMaj7/B symbol is interpreted as a GMaj7 chord over the note B in the bass.



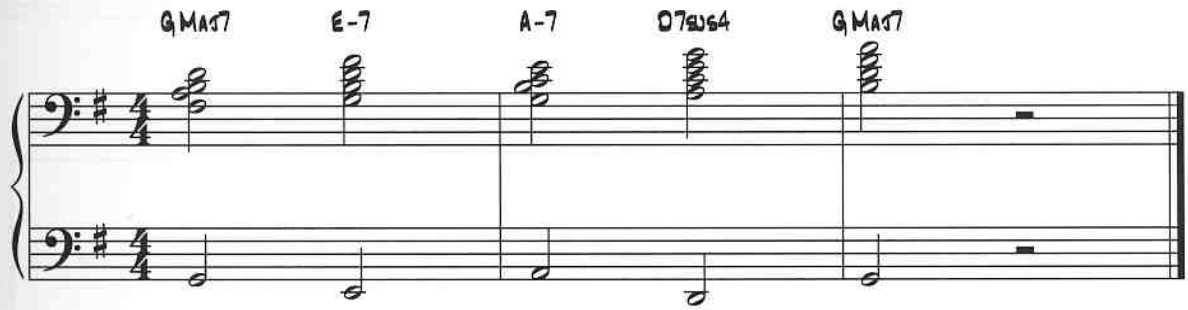
Comping

When accompanying another player, it is common to play chords in the right hand with a bass line in the left hand. This is called *comping* (short for "accompanying").

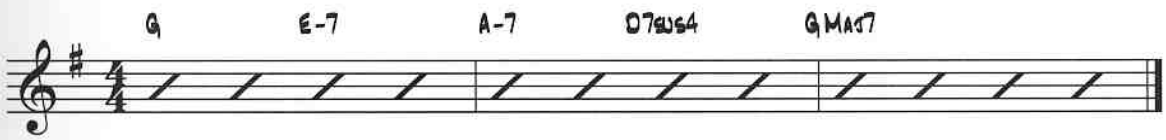


On piano, the range for these comping chord voicings is usually between the D below middle C and the B-flat above middle C.

When you create a comping part, you can use any of the notes in the chord. Always include the root, 3, and 7, but if the root is in your left hand's bass line, you may leave it—and sometimes the 5—out of your right-hand voicing. In your right hand, replace these omitted notes with tensions (9 for 1, 13 for 5).



A *chord chart* is like a lead sheet, except that it indicates only the chords, without the melody. The slashes (/ / / /) mean "create your own part." Play the chords, improvising the inversions and rhythms.

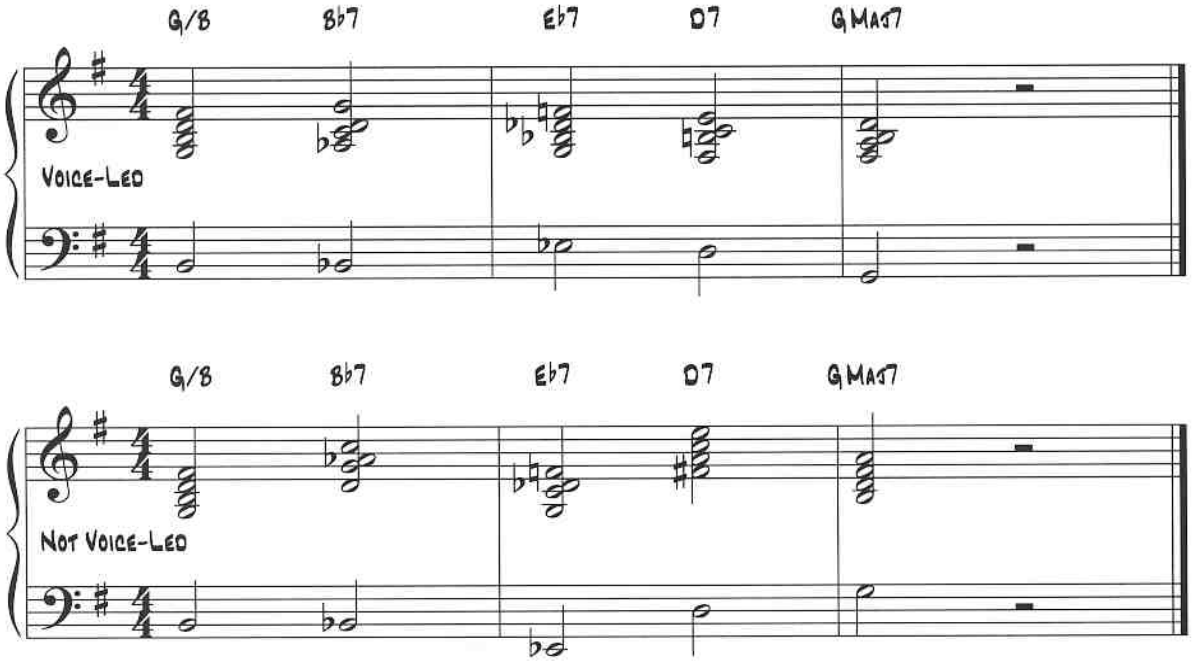


Voice Leading

When moving from one chord to the next, try to minimize the motion. Look for common notes between the two chords, and when a voice must change, move to the closest note of the next chord. This motion of the voices is called *common-tone voice leading.* Generally, you will try to make the chord transitions as smooth as possible.

If the top notes of your voicings move by step, your voice leading will most likely be smooth. Always consider this melodic quality in your comping.

Below, compare the melodic character of the voice-led version to the second version.



Tip

One way to check your melodic content (and hence, voice leading) is by singing the top voice of your chords. Which of the above examples is more singable?

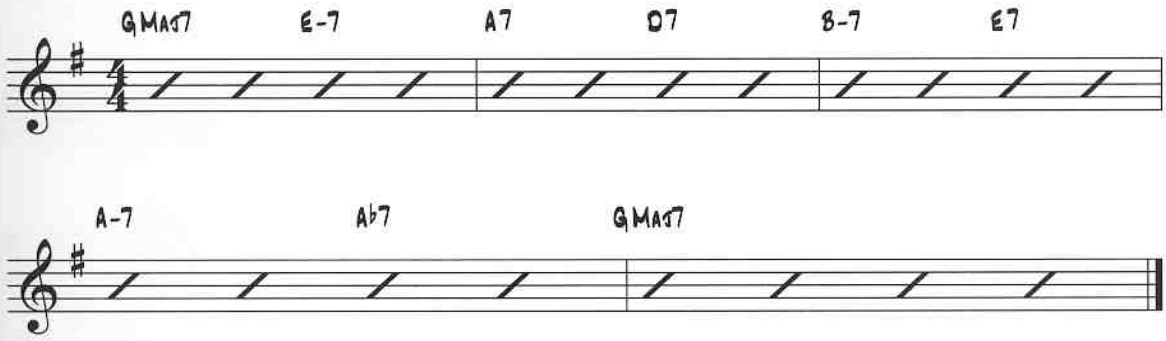
PRACTICE

Comping Practice

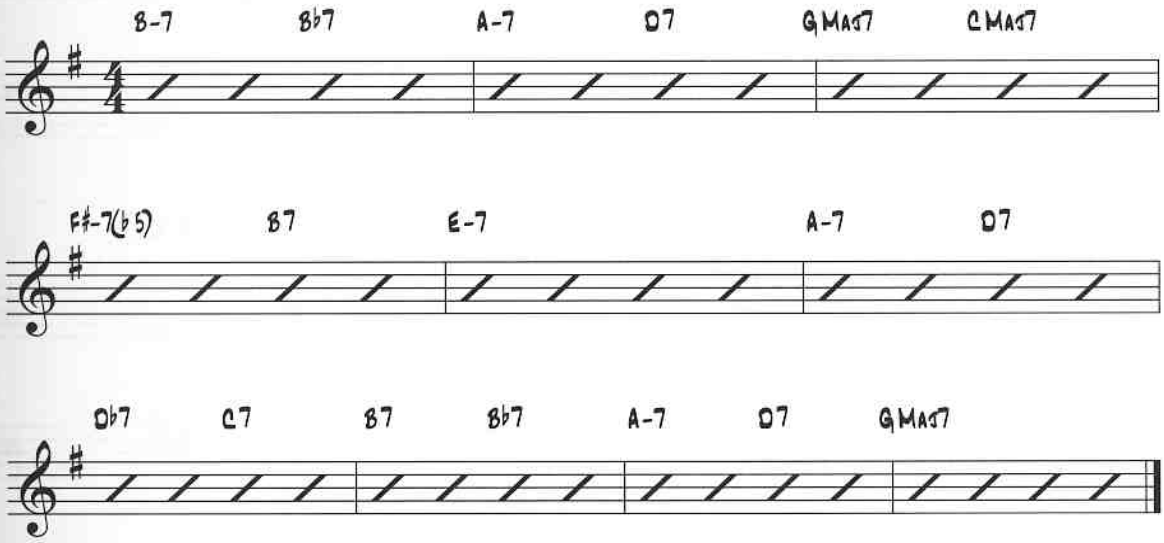
Practice these two chord charts in three different ways.

1. Play these chords in root position with your left hand.
2. Play them again with your right hand, and play the root note with your left hand. Substitute 9s freely in your right-hand voicings.
3. Play the progression, and try to make your voice leading as smooth as possible.

Exercise 1. Comping Practice



Exercise 2. Comping Practice



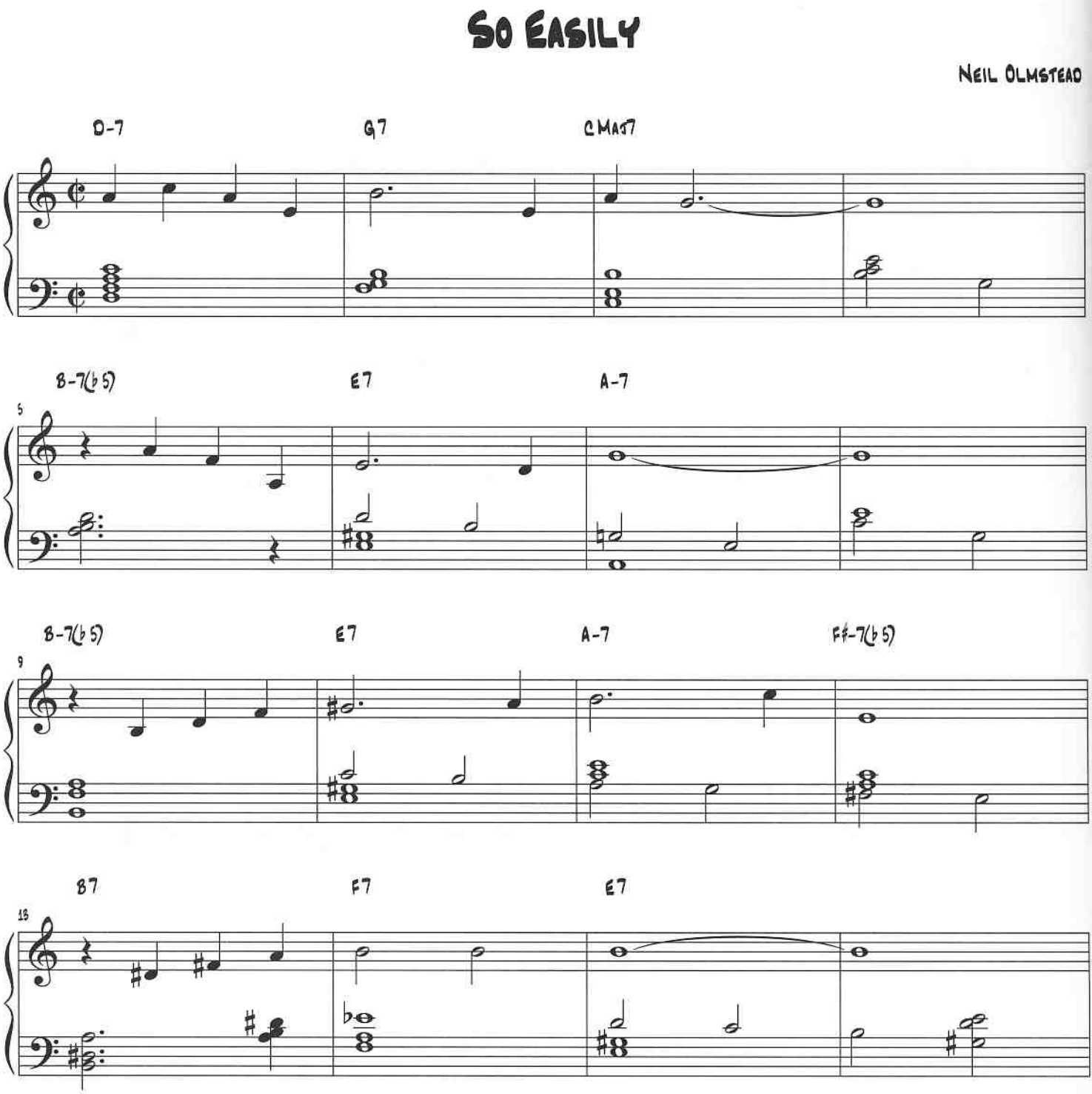
CHALLENGE

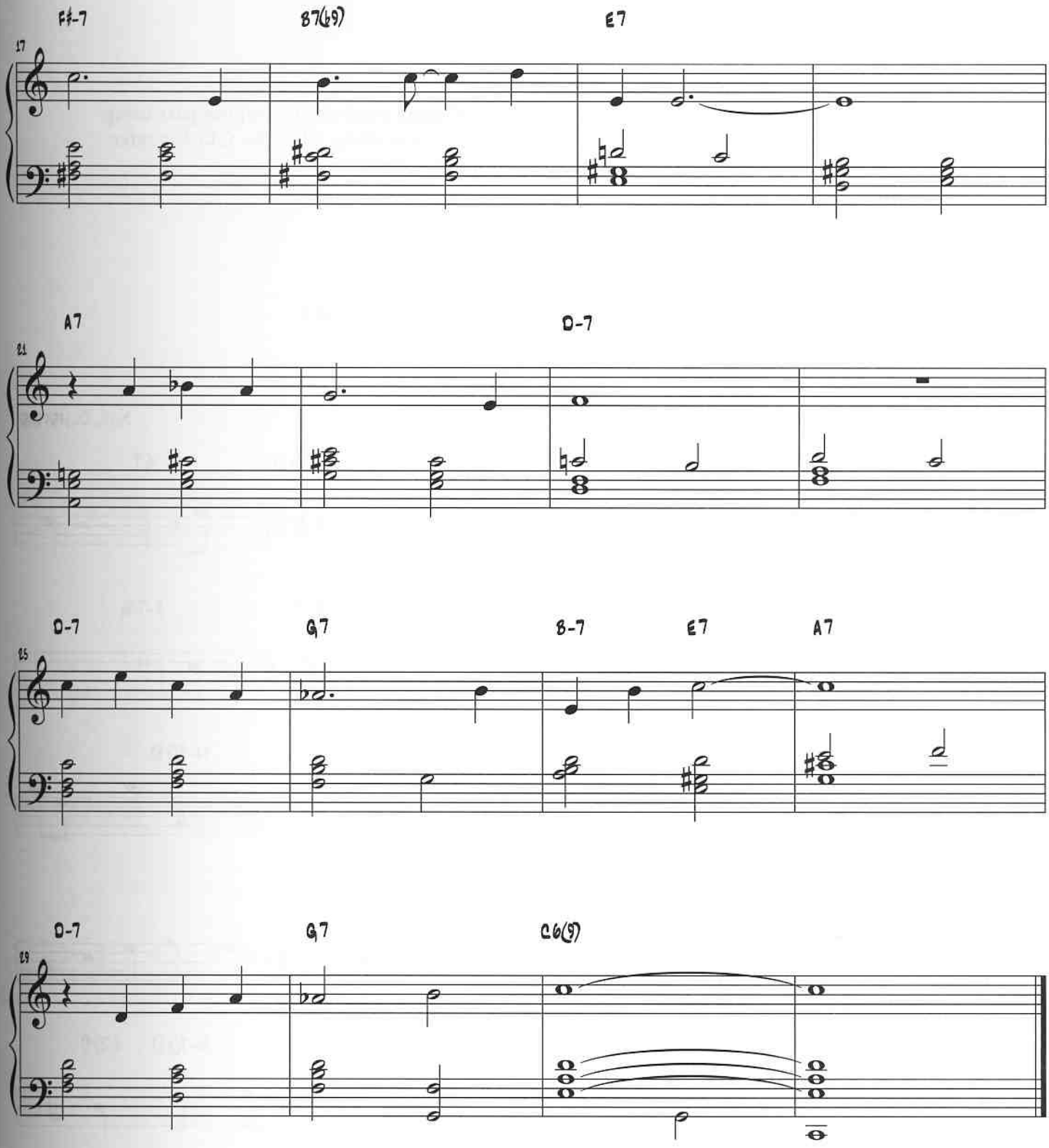
Repeat step (3) above. Can you replace the root in the right hand with a tension?

TUNES

Etude. "So Easily"

"So Easily" is based on the chord changes to "I Fall in Love Too Easily" by Jerome Kern. This piece illustrates a melody in the right hand with a variety of chords in the left hand (as you did in theory step 4 earlier this chapter). Note the different inversions used and the independent lines of harmony.



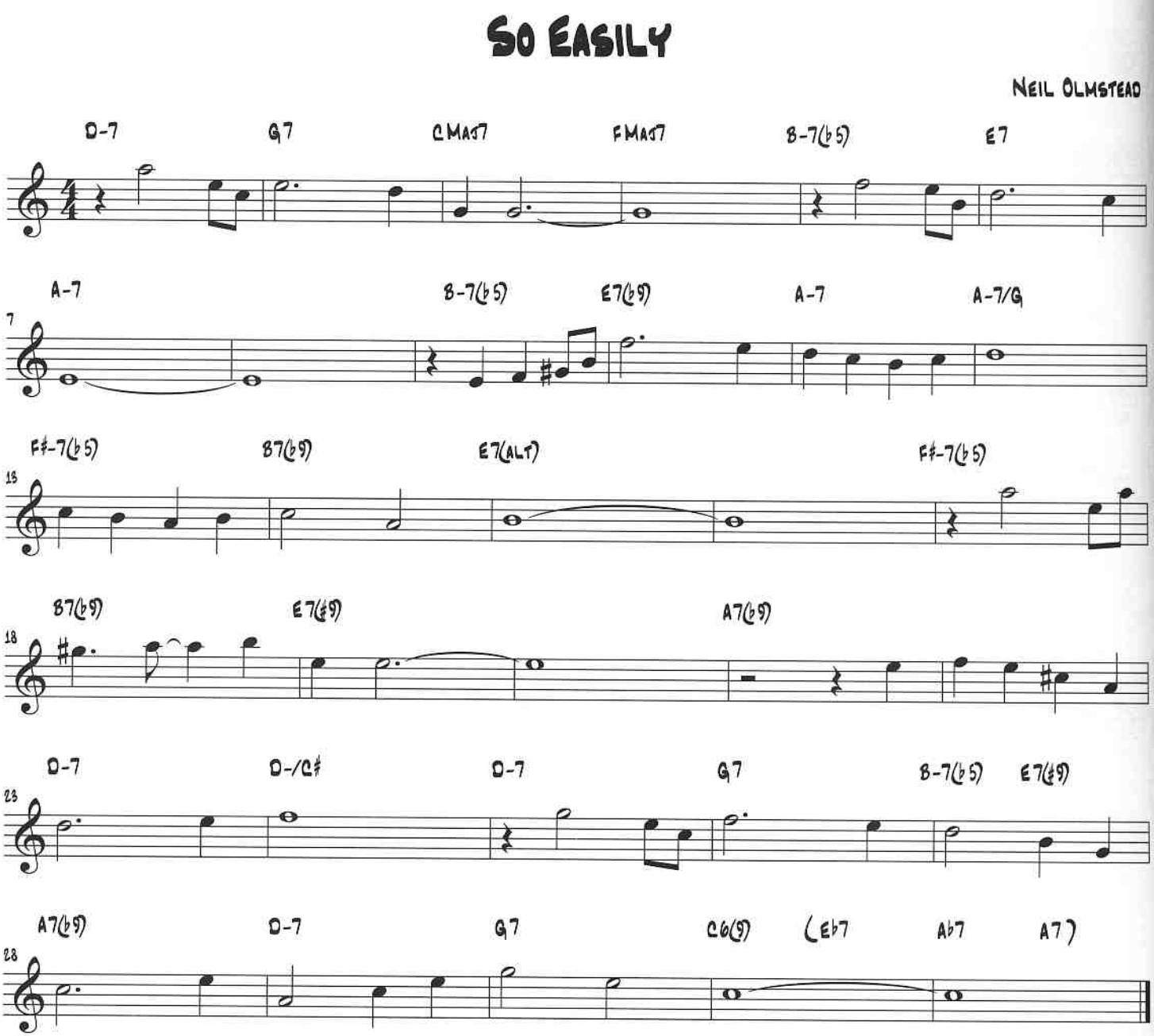

F♯-7
B7(♭9)
E7
17
A7
D-7
21
D-7
G7
B-7
E7
A7
25
D-7
G7
C6(9)
29

Lead Sheet. "So Easily"

1

This lead sheet is for the same tune as the etude. Create your own comping part using the chord symbols. Focus on rhythmic feel and voice leading. Use the CD for reference, as an example of how your arrangement might sound.

1. Play only the melody.
2. Play the melody with bass notes.
3. Play the melody, bass notes, and some inner harmony.
4. Play the melody in the right hand and chords in the left hand.



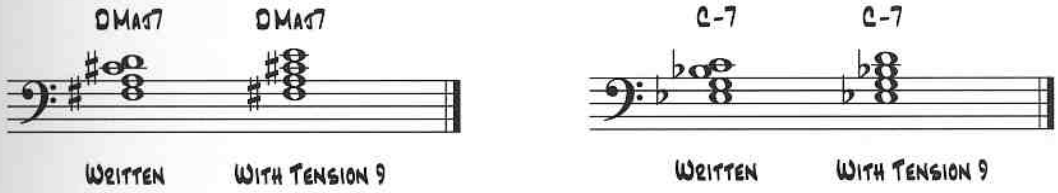
Chapter 2. Chord Extensions

Beyond the Basic Chord Tones

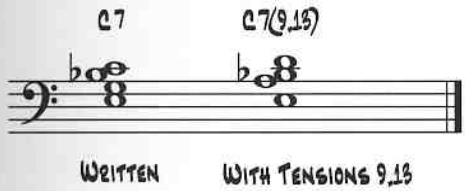
THEORY

In the fifties, pianists such as Red Garland and Bill Evans put more color into their harmonic language. Doubling the root and 5 sounded heavy and redundant, as the bass was playing those notes, so they began to replace the root and 5 with extensions to the chord, such as the 9 and 13, even when those extensions were not indicated on the lead sheet. We now generally refer to these notes as *tensions* (short for "extensions") and the process of using them as *tension substitution.*

Here are some common chords in their written form and then again, with tensions. In major and minor chords, the 9 is often substituted for the root, most often in first and third inversions.



In dominant chords, the 9 is often substituted for the root, and the 13 for the 5, commonly set in first and third inversions.

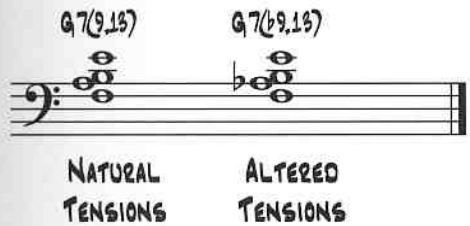


Altered Dominant

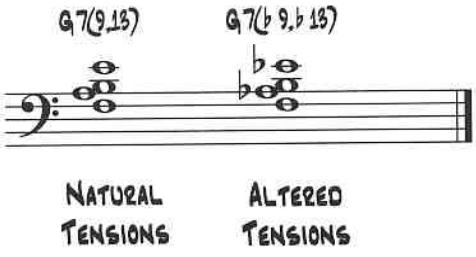
Because the dominant chord has the most dissonant function, the tensions are often *altered* (raised or lowered a half step), particularly in minor keys. Again, these are commonly set in first and third inversions.

Here are some common altered dominant-7 combinations:

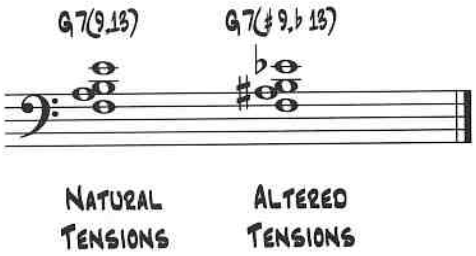
♭9, 13



♭9, ♭13


G7(9,13)
G7(♭9,♭13)
NATURAL TENSIONS
ALTERED TENSIONS

♯9, ♭13

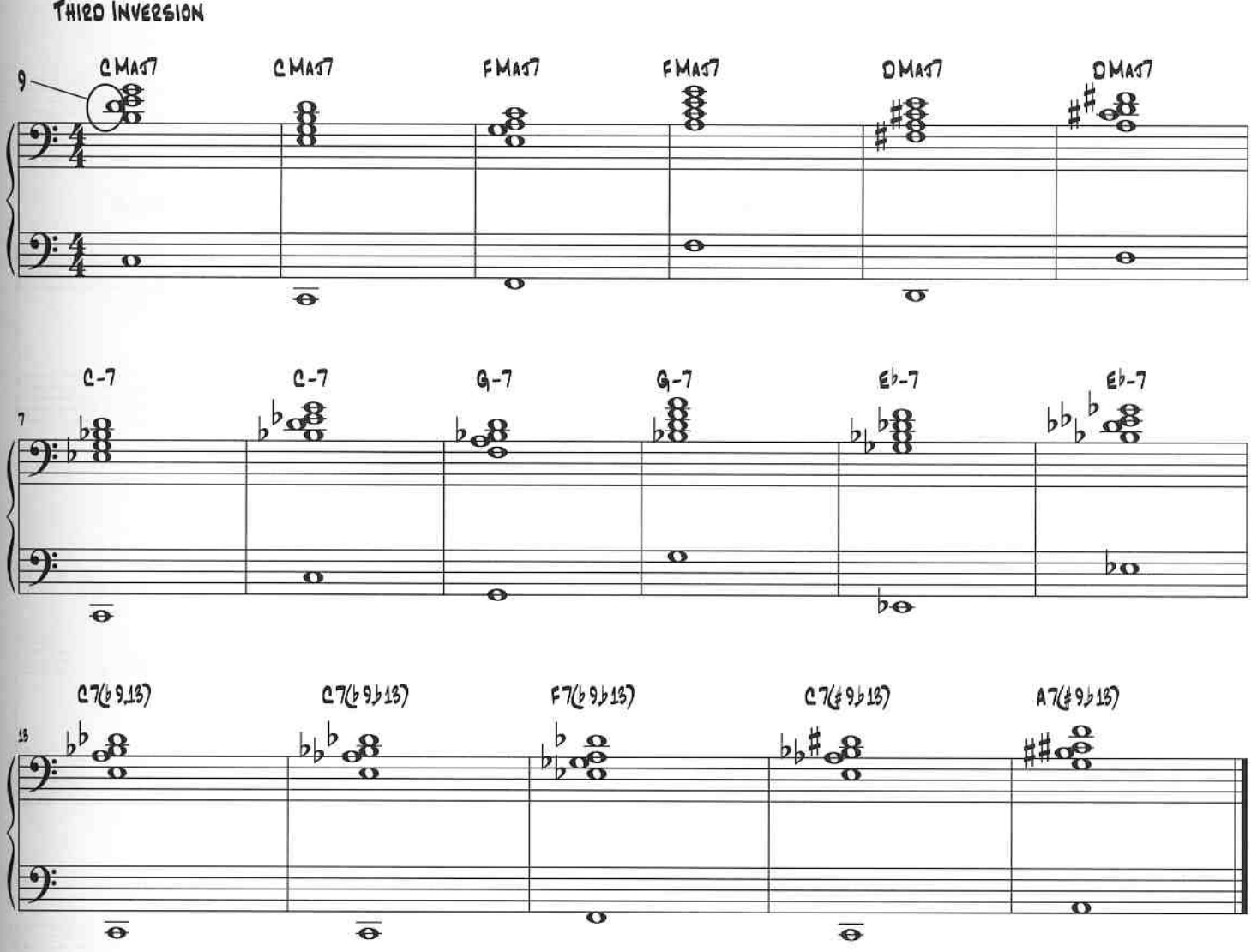

G7(9,13)
G7(♯9,♭13)
NATURAL TENSIONS
ALTERED TENSIONS

PRACTICE

Chord Voicings

Exercise. Analysis of Extended Chords

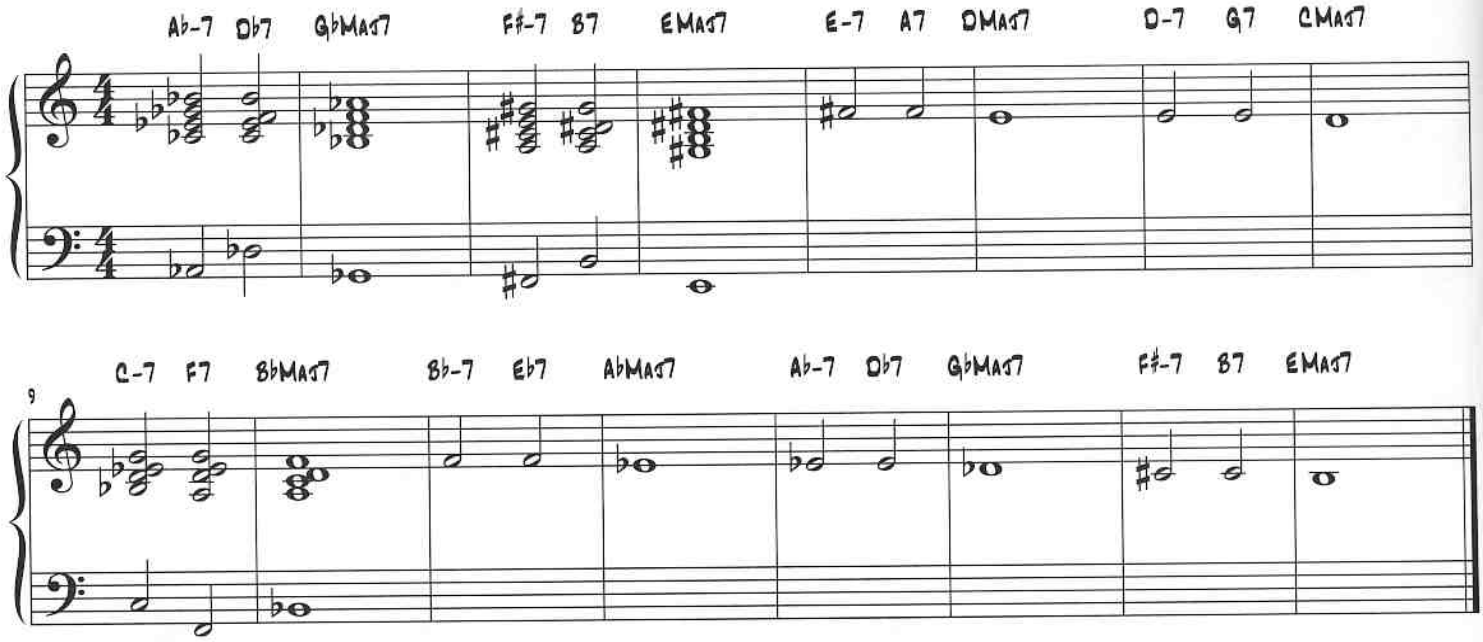
Practice these chord voicings, adding the chord root in your left hand, as illustrated. They are all common voicings that can be used in your comping. Analyze each chord, circling and labeling the tensions, and indicating inversions. For example, the first one uses a tension 9, and it is in third inversion. Note that second inversion major 7 and minor 7 chords often have no tension.



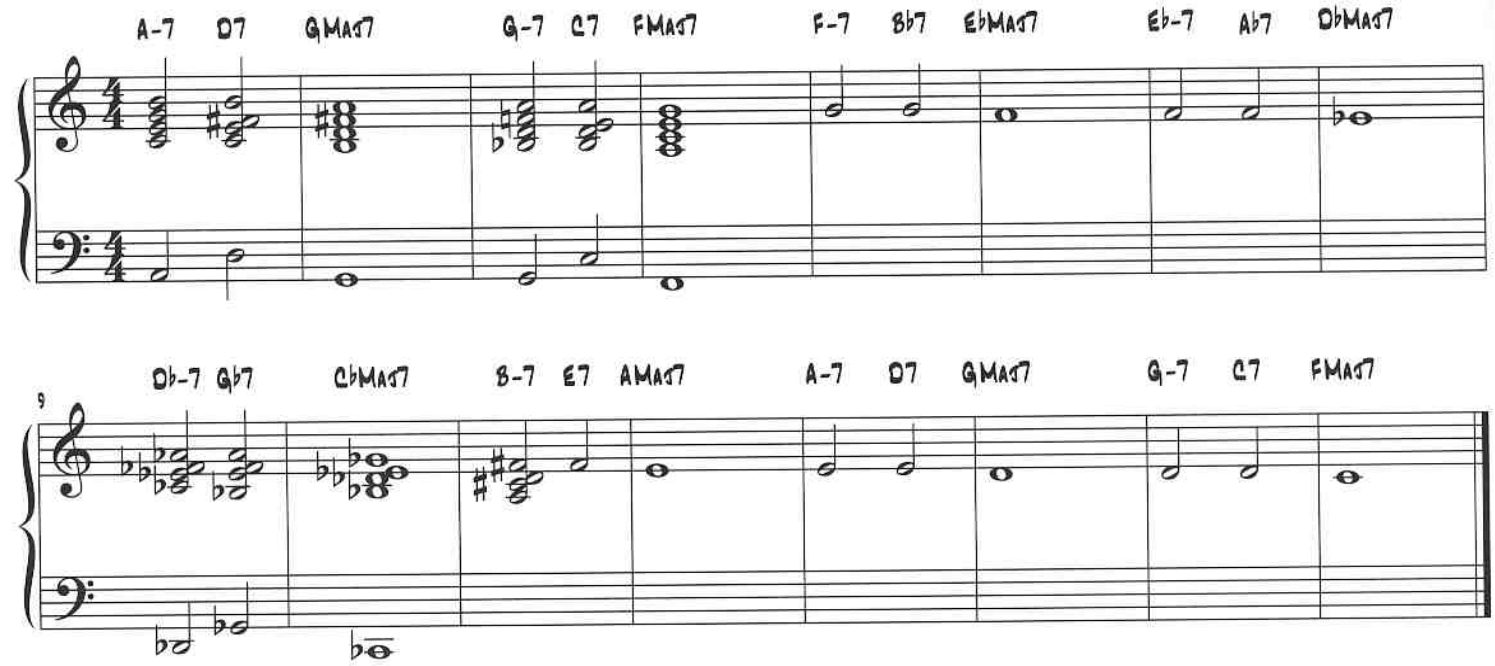
II-V-I Exercises

Going from the II to the V to the I chord (the chords built on the second, fifth, and tonic scale degrees) is among the most common progressions in jazz. These exercises will help develop your facility playing II-V-I progressions. Following the cue notes (top voice), continue the voice-leading pattern to the end.

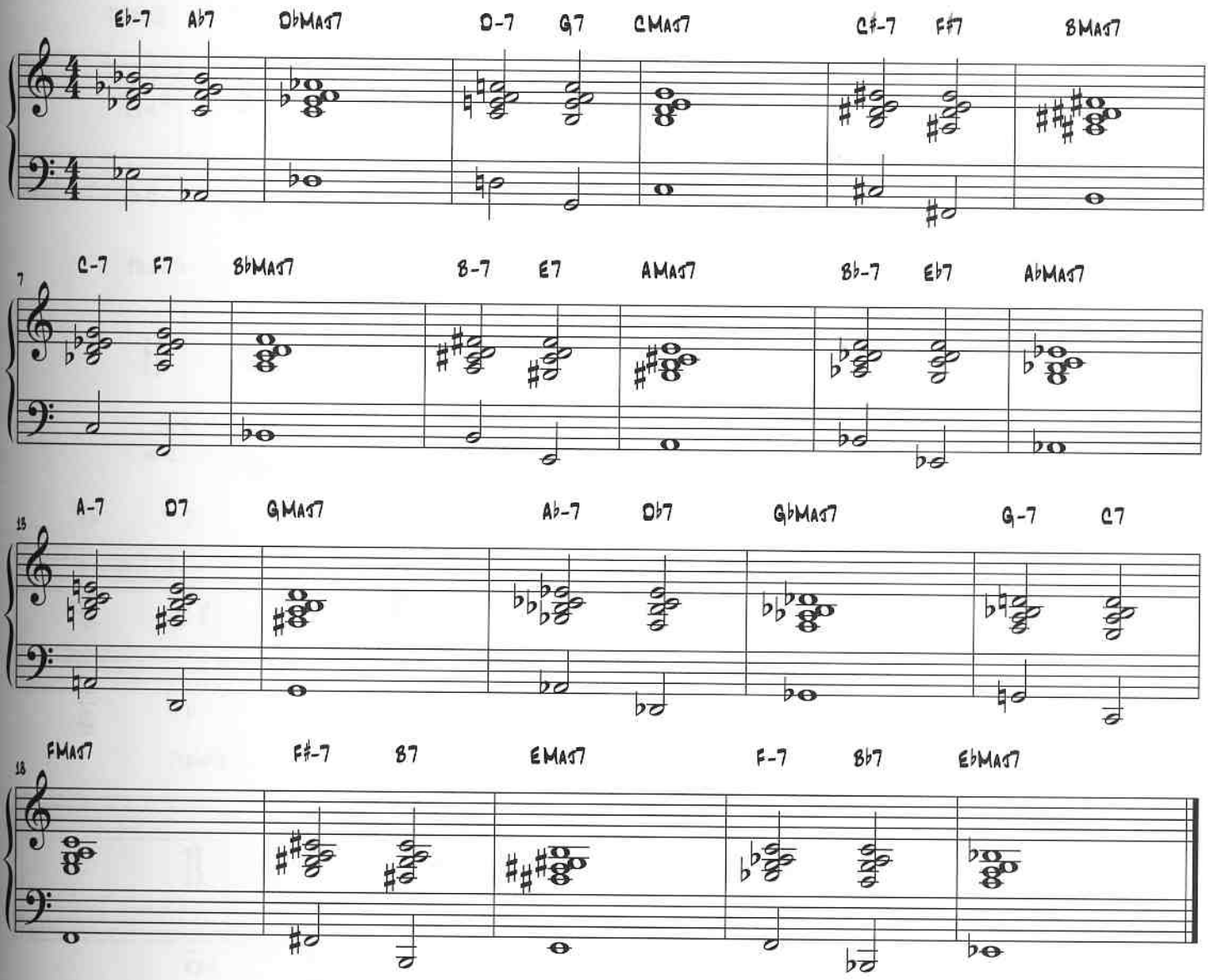
Exercise 1. II-V-I in Major



Exercise 2. II-V-I in Major

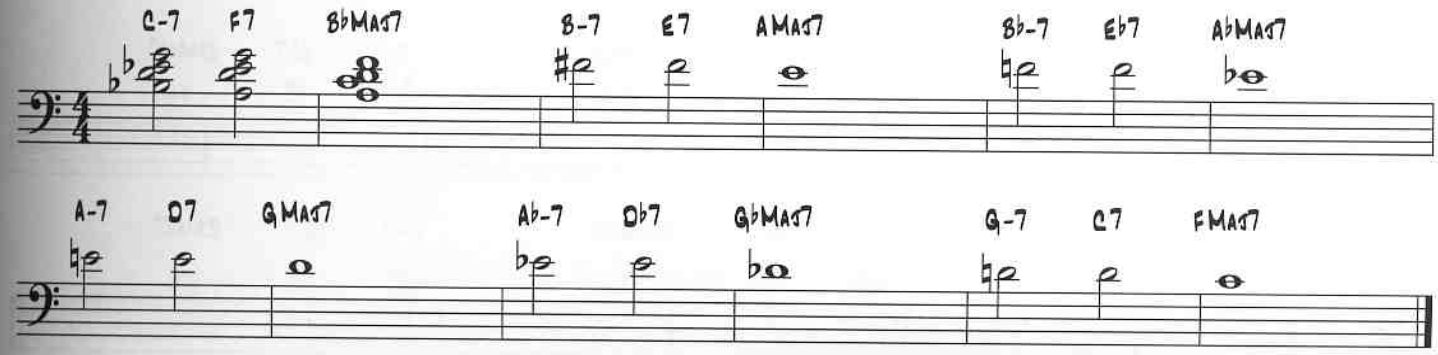


Exercise 3. II-V-I Major Chromatic Descent

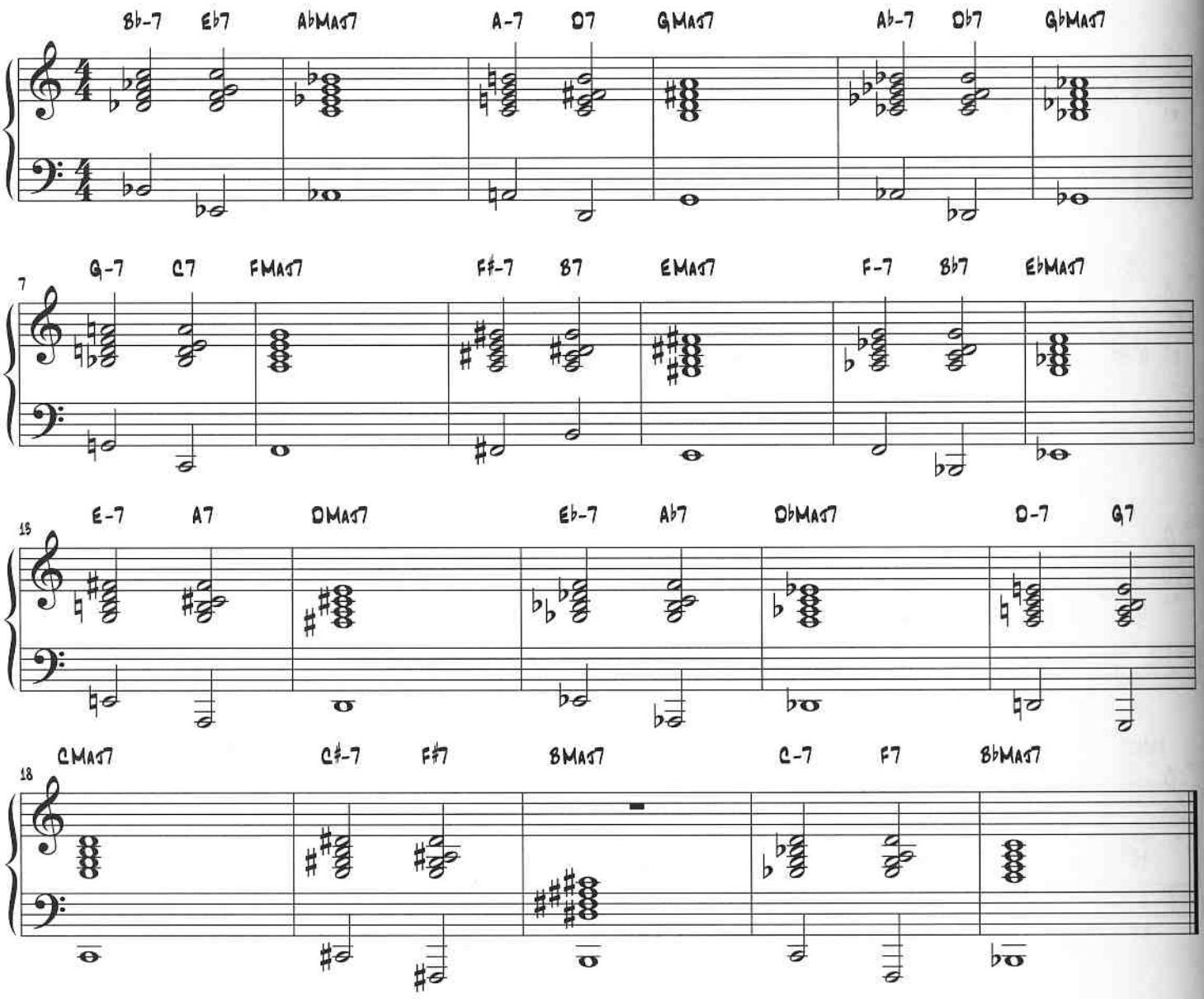


Exercise 4. Left Hand Practice

Practice this next progression in your left hand only. After the first II-V-I, fill in the rest of the notes, using smooth voice leading.

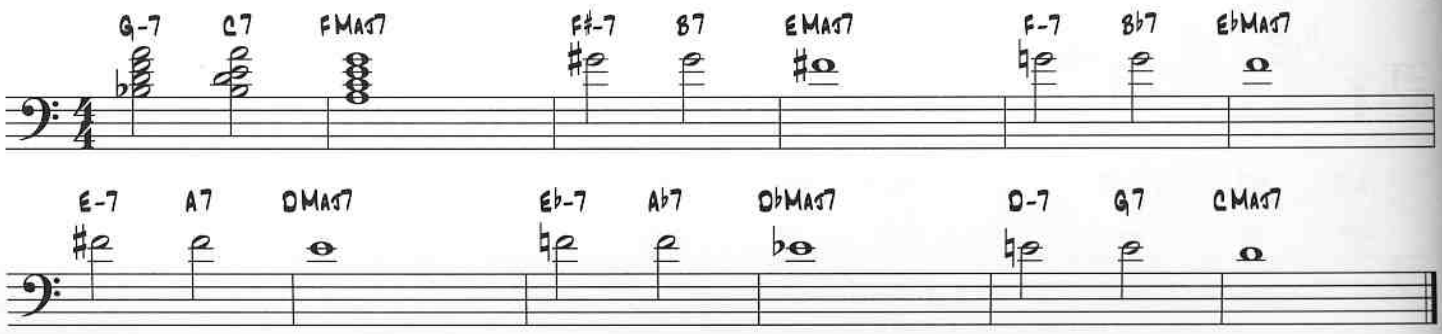


Exercise 5. II-V-I Major Chromatic Descent



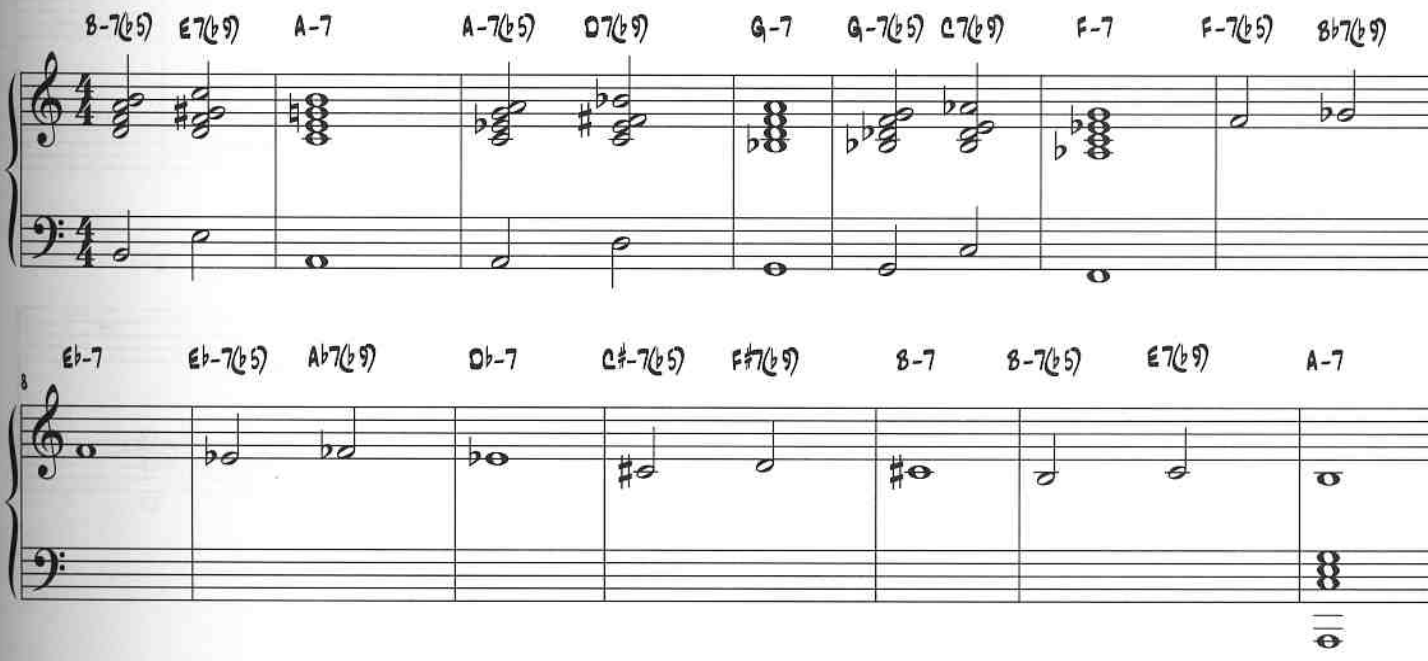
Exercise 6. Left Hand Practice

Practice this next progression in your left hand only. After the first II-V-I, fill in the rest of the notes, using smooth voice leading.

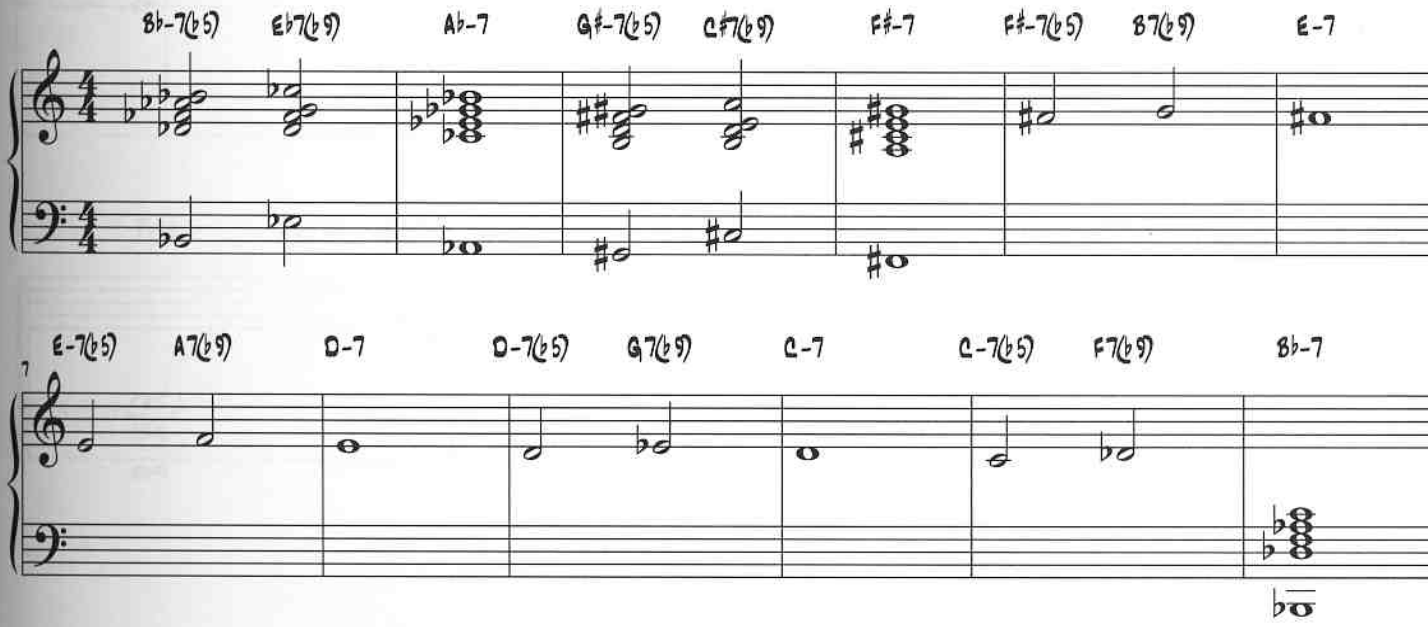


Exercise 7. II-V-I in Minor

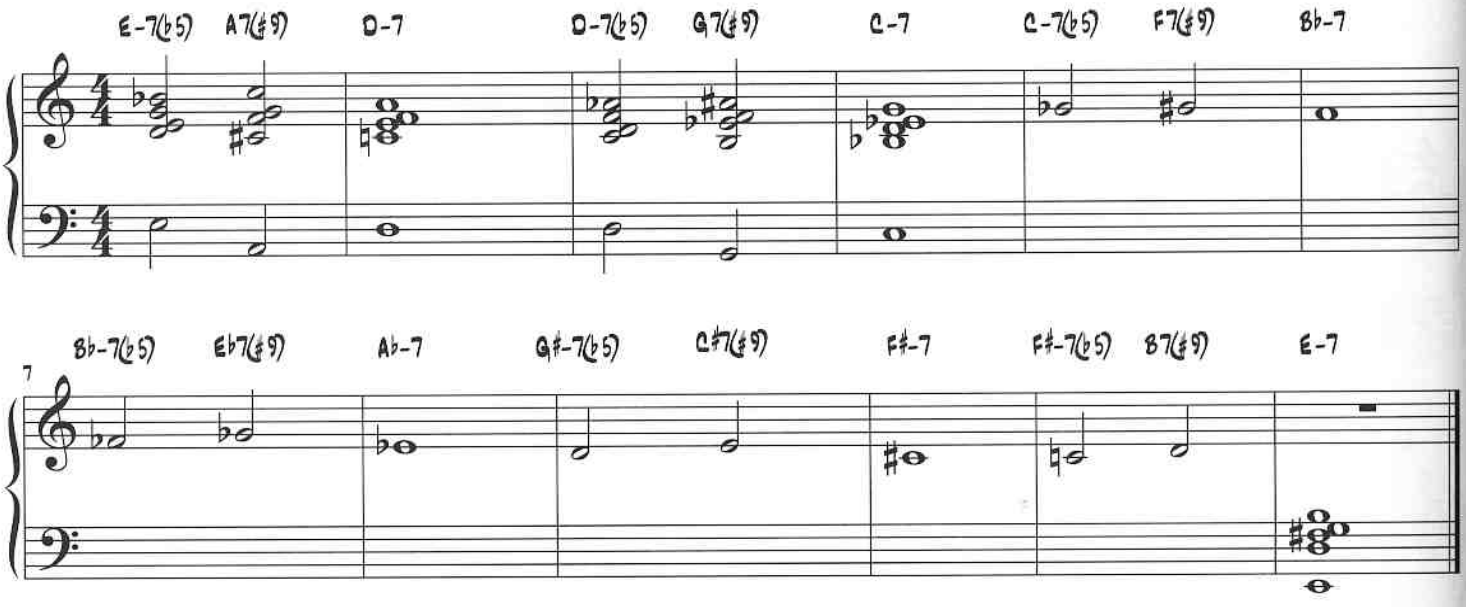
Complete the next few exercises, using smooth voice leading. Note the altered tensions of these dominant chords in minor.



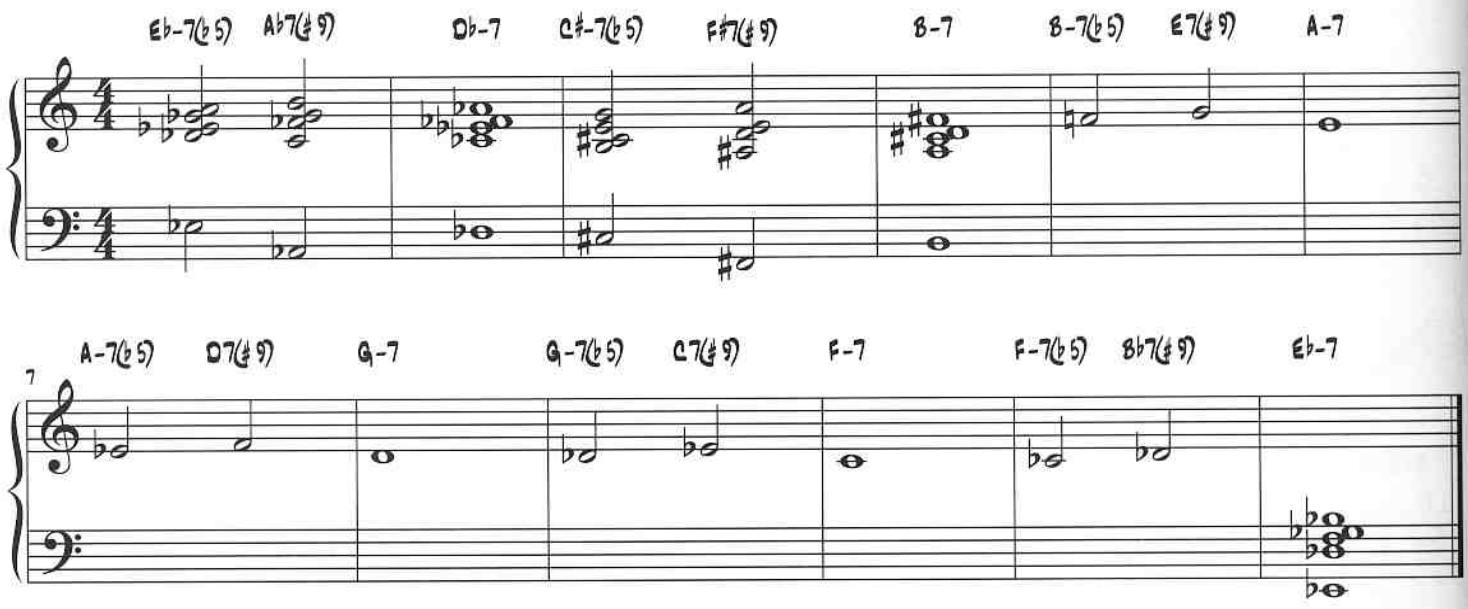
Exercise 8. II-V-I in Minor



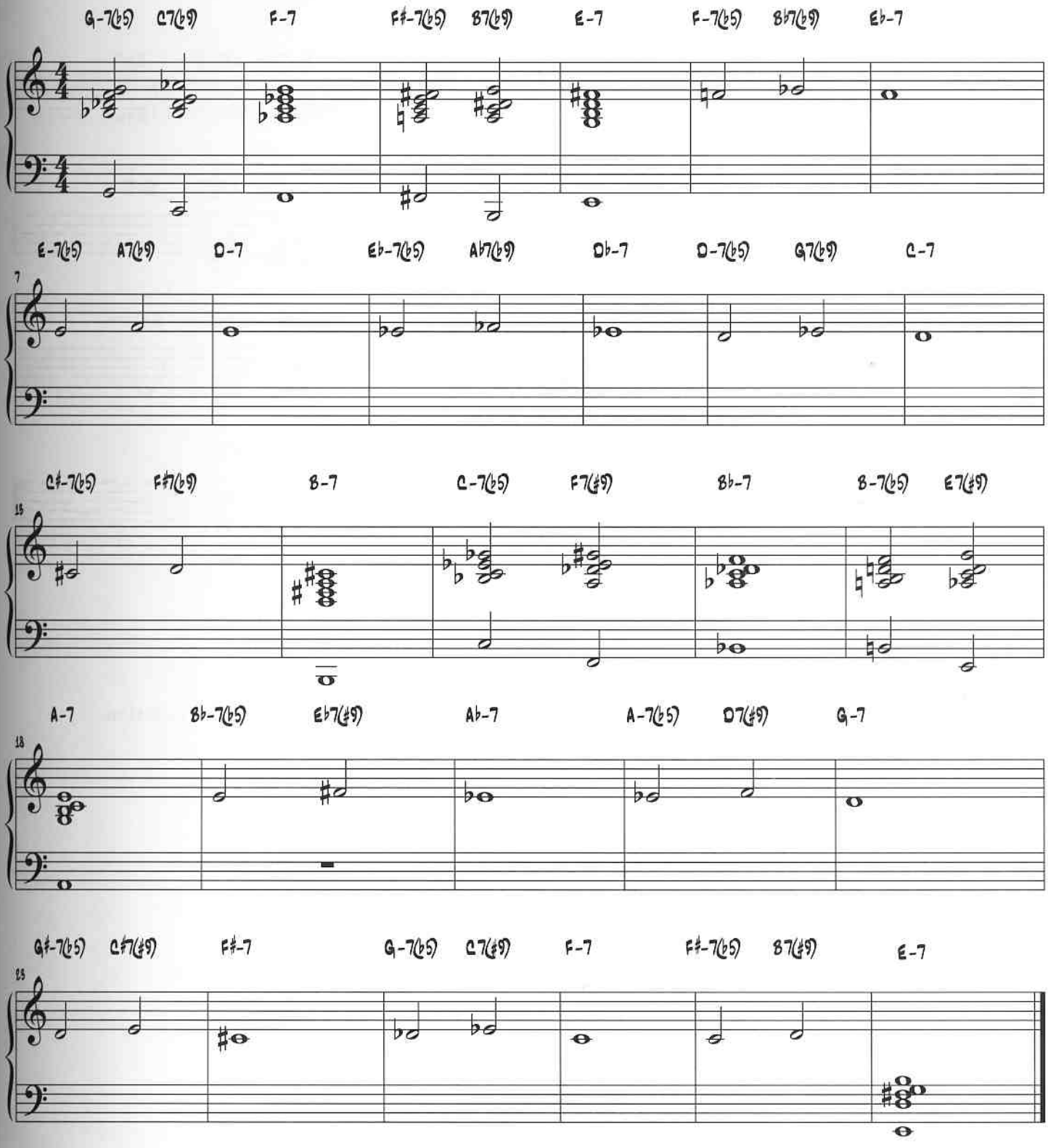
Exercise 9. II-V-I in Minor



Exercise 10. II-V-I in Minor

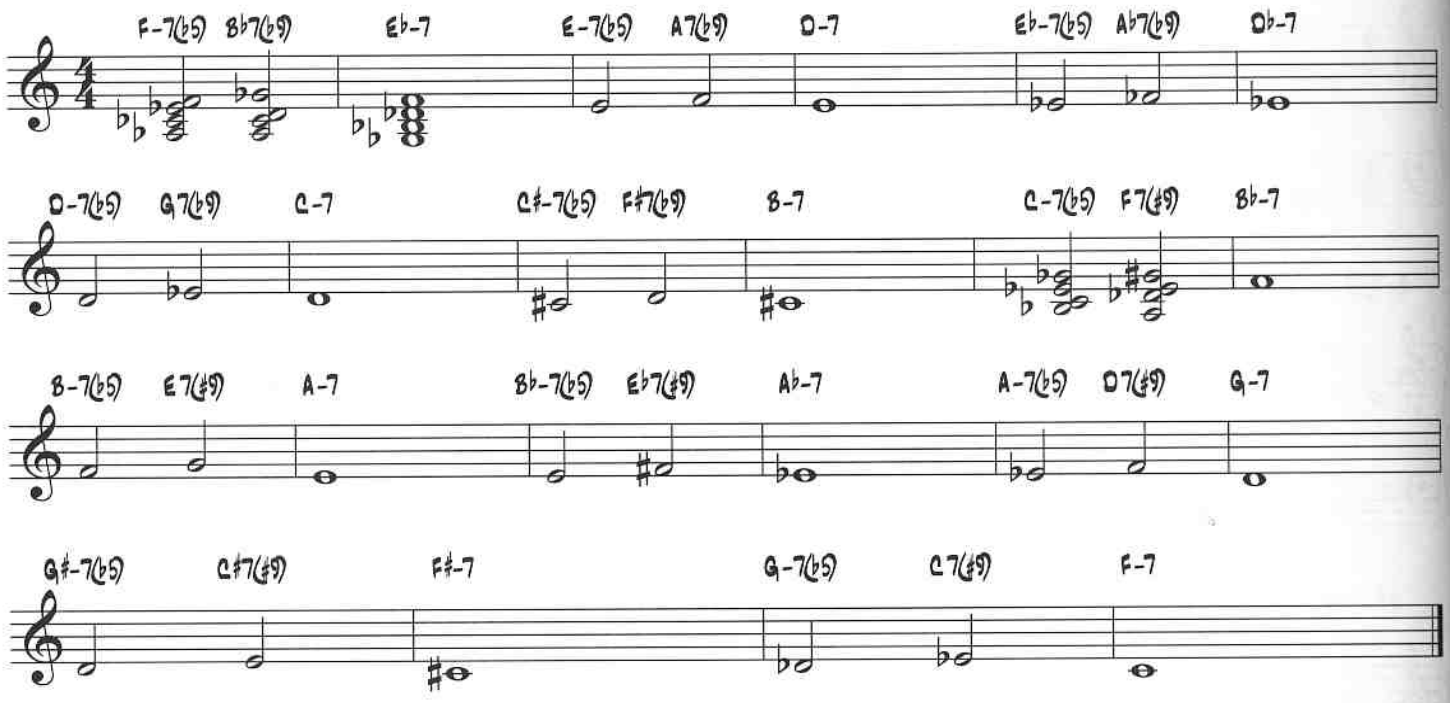


Exercise 11. II-V-I Minor Chromatic Descent



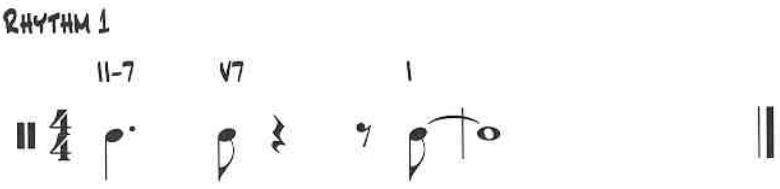
Exercise 12. Left Hand Practice

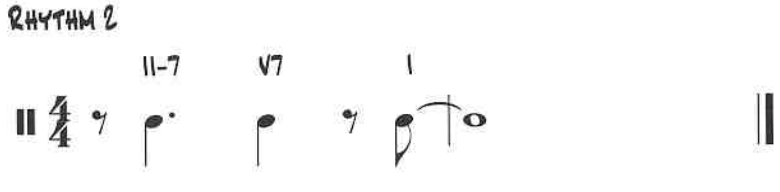
Practice this next progression in your left hand only.



Exercise 13. Comping Rhythms

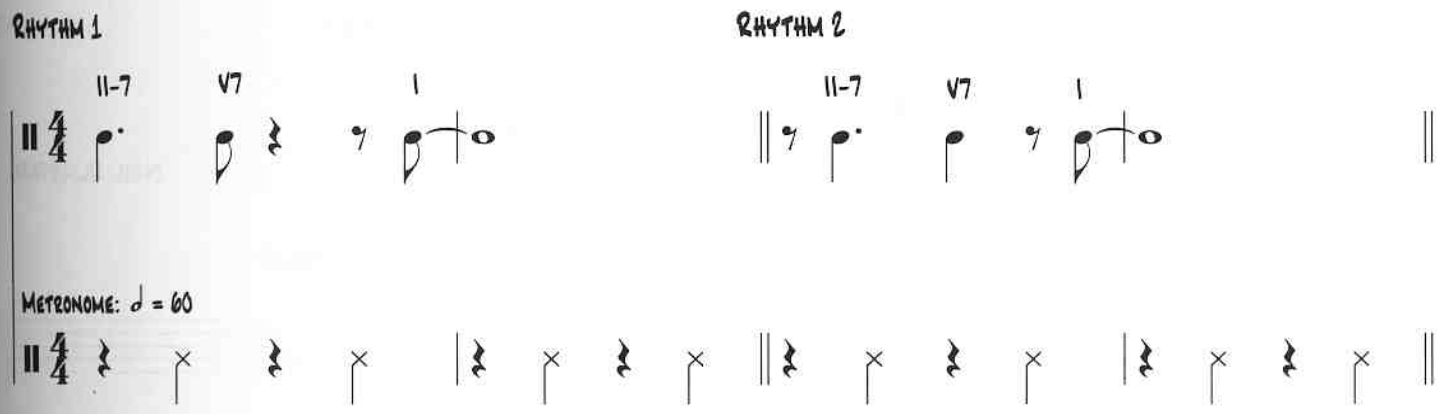
Practice playing these II V I exercises from memory, without looking at the notation. Play each exercise once using each rhythm.





CHALLENGE

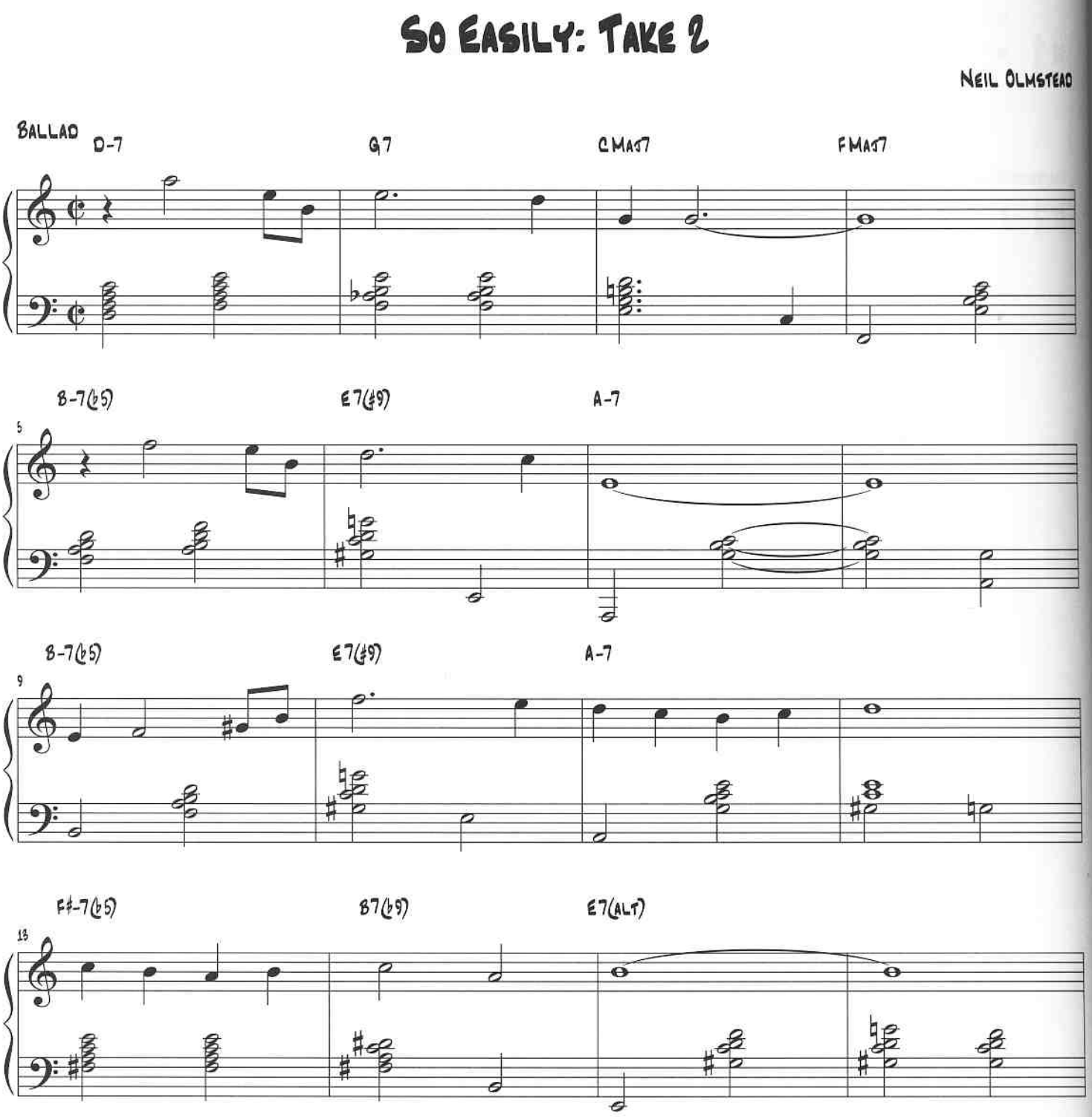
For an added challenge, set a metronome to click on beats 2 and 4, and do the exercises against that.

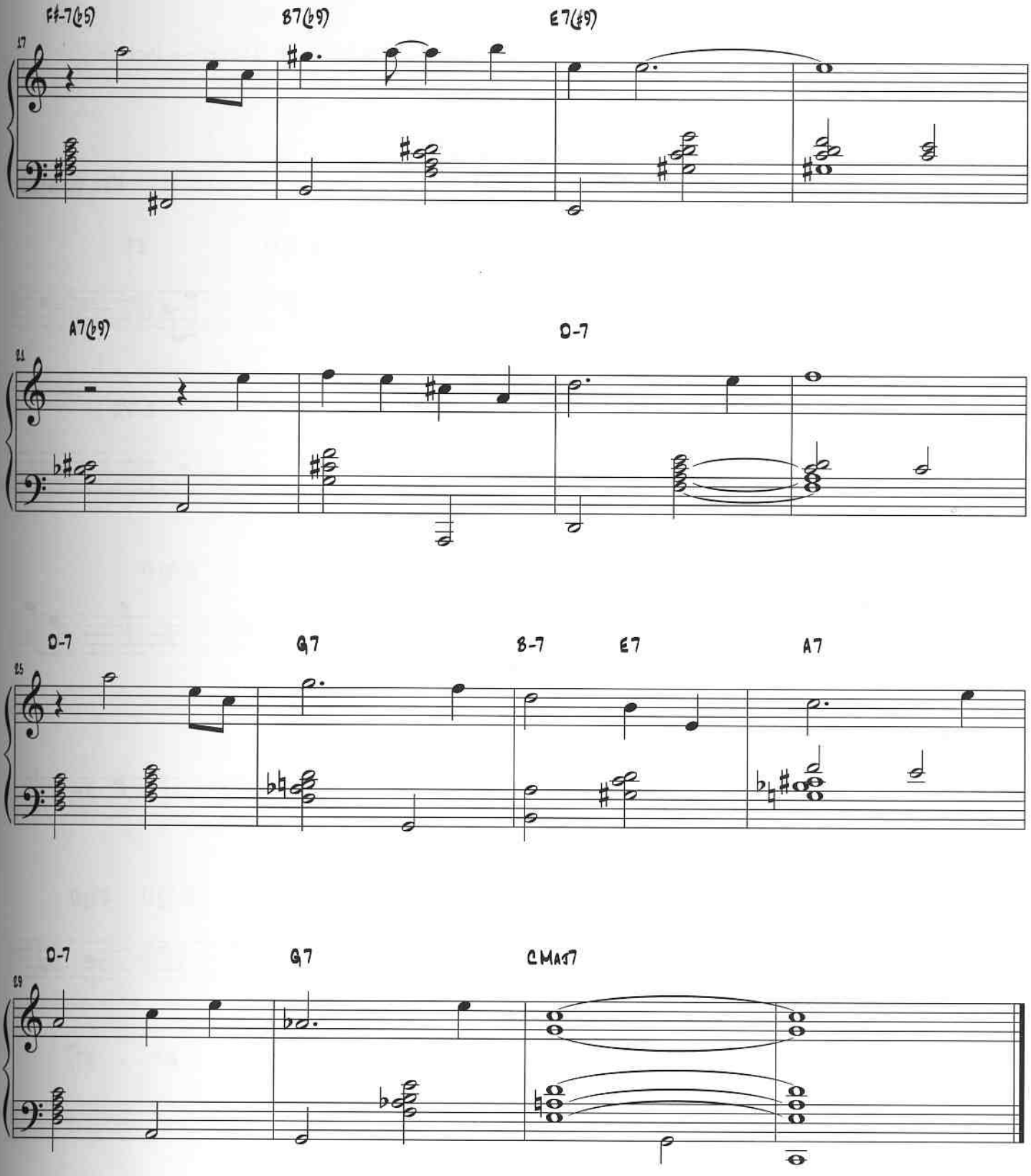


TUNES

Etude. "So Easily: Take 2"

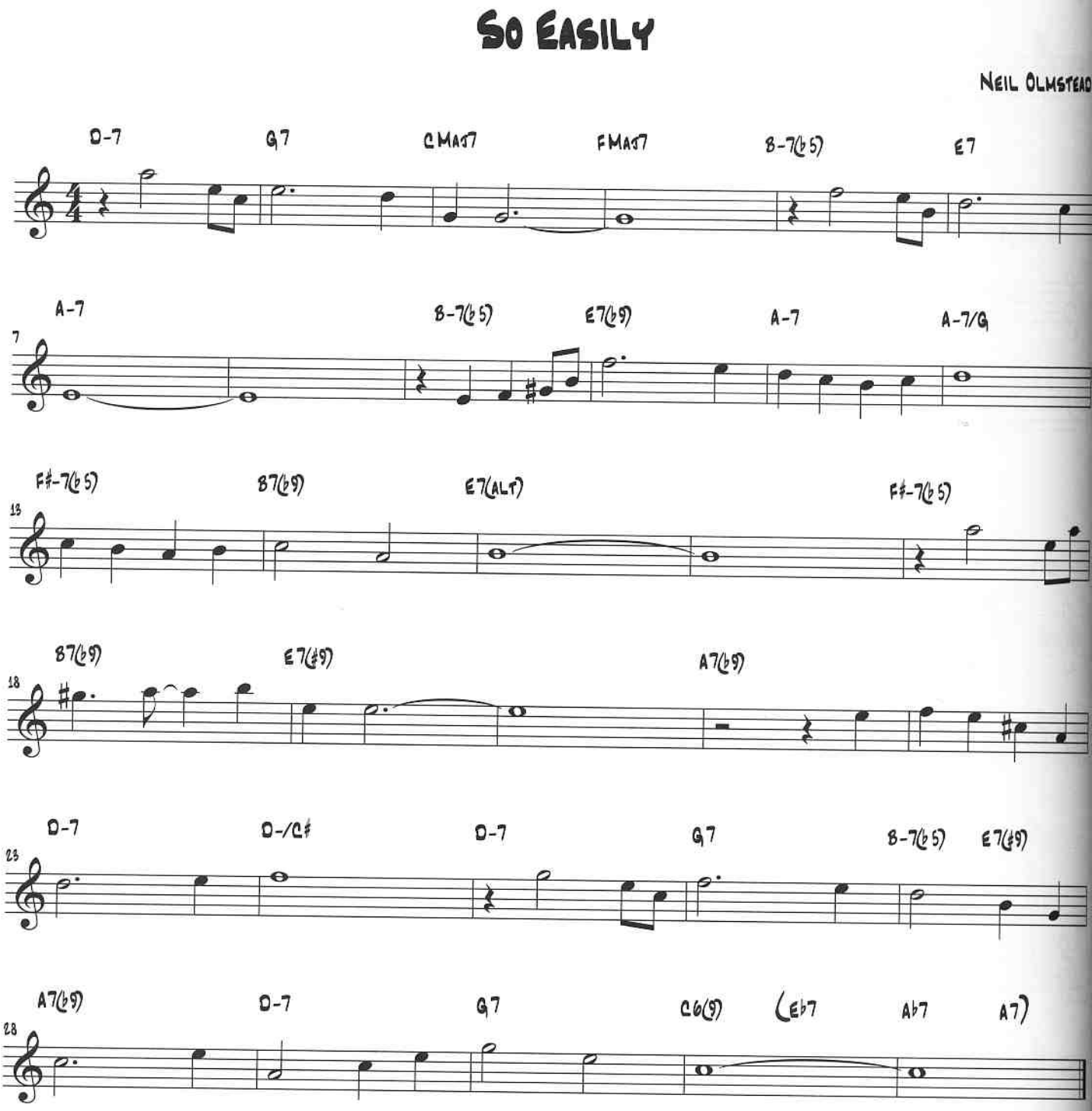
This etude is based on the chord changes to "I Fall in Love Too Easily" by Jerome Kern. Compare this to the previous version, in chapter 1. Analyze the tension substitutions in this piece, writing the number next to the tone. Then play it through.




F♯-7(♭5)
B7(♭9)
E7(♯9)
17
A7(♭9)
D-7
21
D-7
G7
B-7
E7
A7
25
D-7
G7
CMAJ7
29

Lead Sheet. "So Easily"

Play the lead sheet to "So Easily," which was introduced in lesson 1. This time, include tensions in your voicings.



Etude. "I Had a Clue"

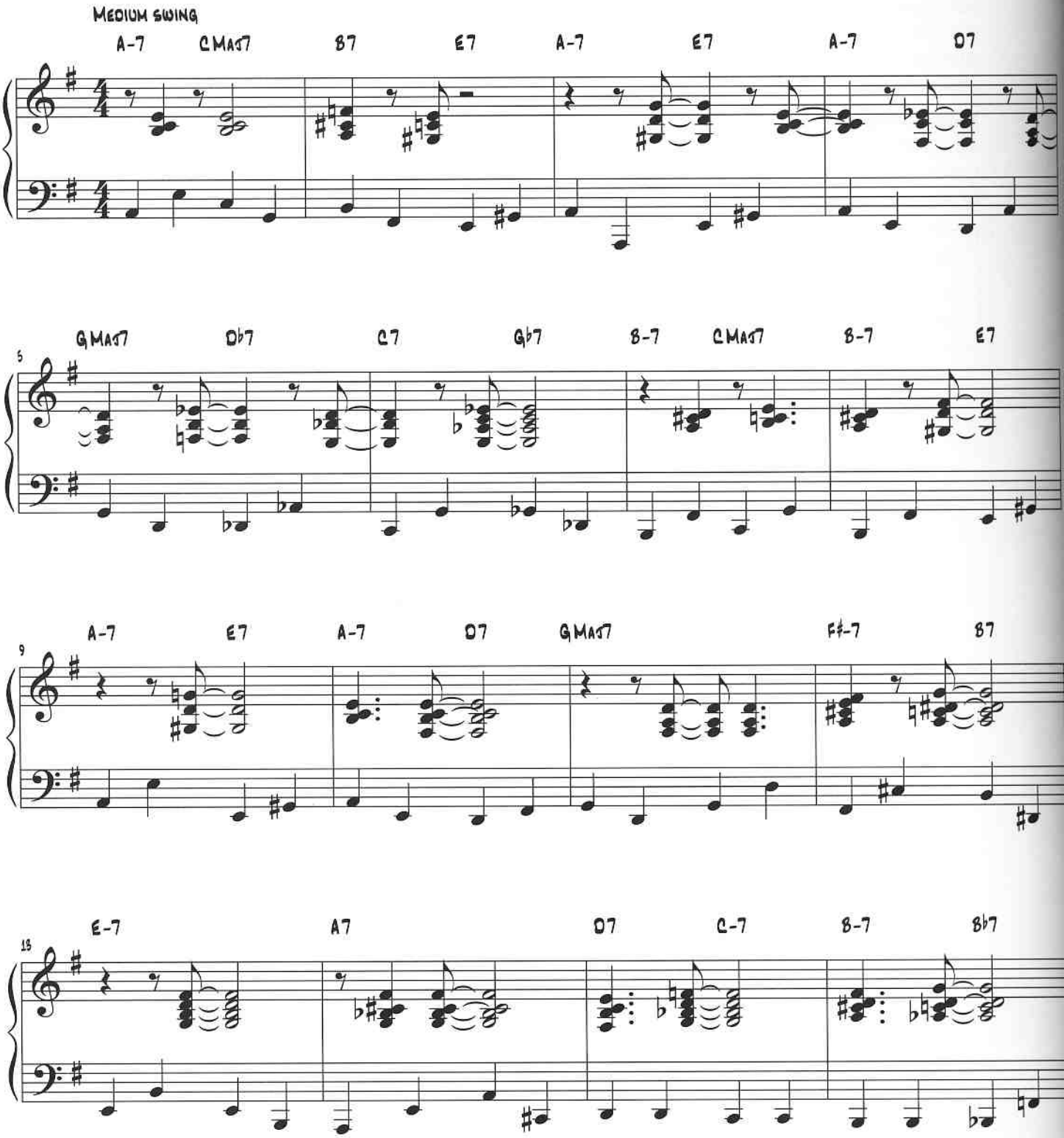
"I Had a Clue" is based upon Bill Evans' changes to the Harry Warren tune, "I Wish I Knew." This etude illustrates how chords with tensions are played against a walking bass line. In the following chapters, you will learn to create your own bass lines. The chords are comprised of *three-* and *four-note close position* voicings with tension substitutions (*9 for root* on most major and minor chords, and *13 for 5* on most dominant chords).

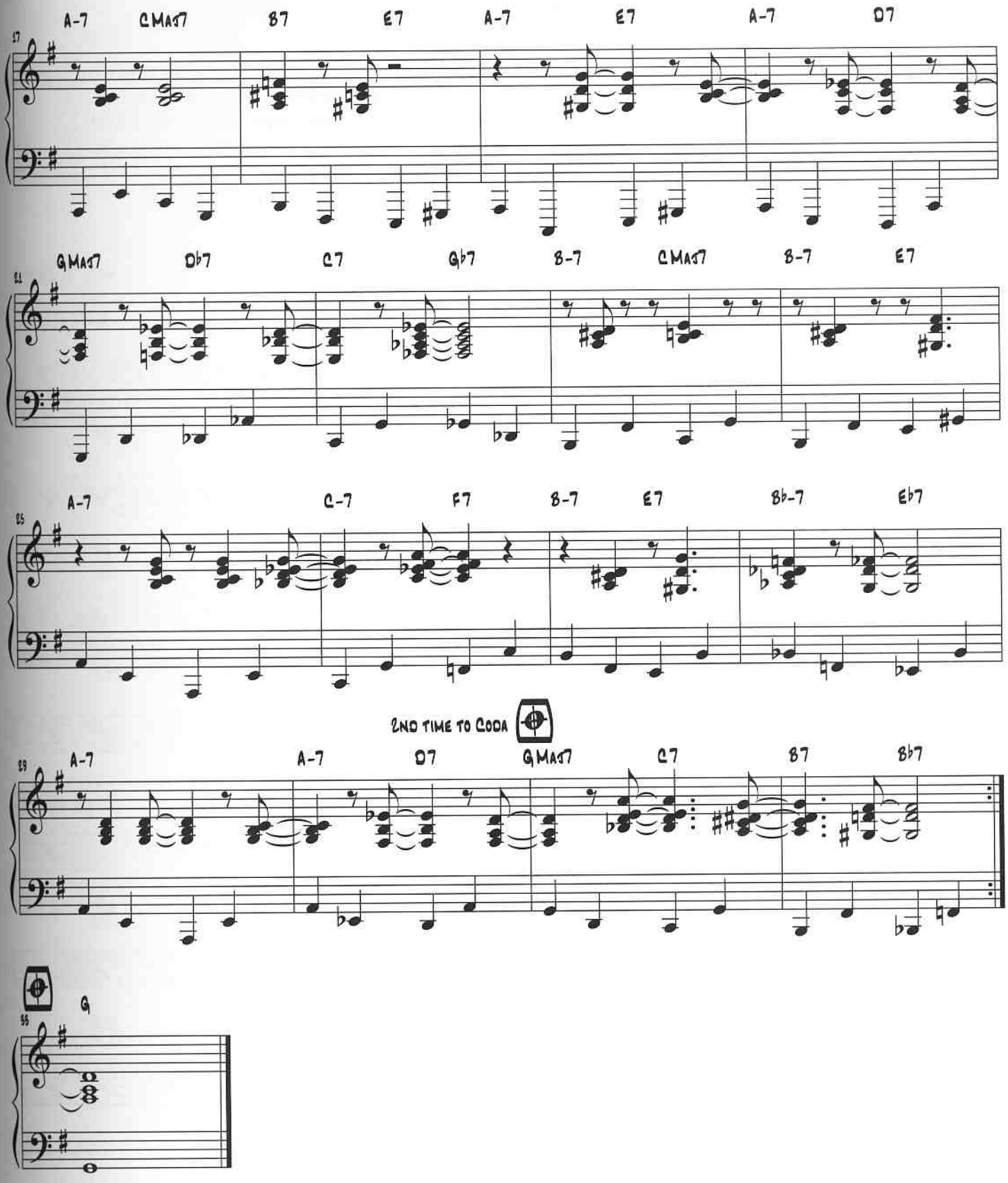
Most of the rhythms used here are in two-measure phrases (e.g., mm. 1–2, 7–8, etc.). This helps to eliminate rhythmic repetition. The syncopations of measures 3–6 are typical of many pianists of the bop period (1944–58). Listen to Red Garland on Miles Davis' recordings from the 1950s to hear more of this kind of rhythmic playing.

> **Tip**
>
> Moving the top voice *primarily by step,* in logical rhythmic phrases, helps create a strong accompaniment.

I Had a Clue

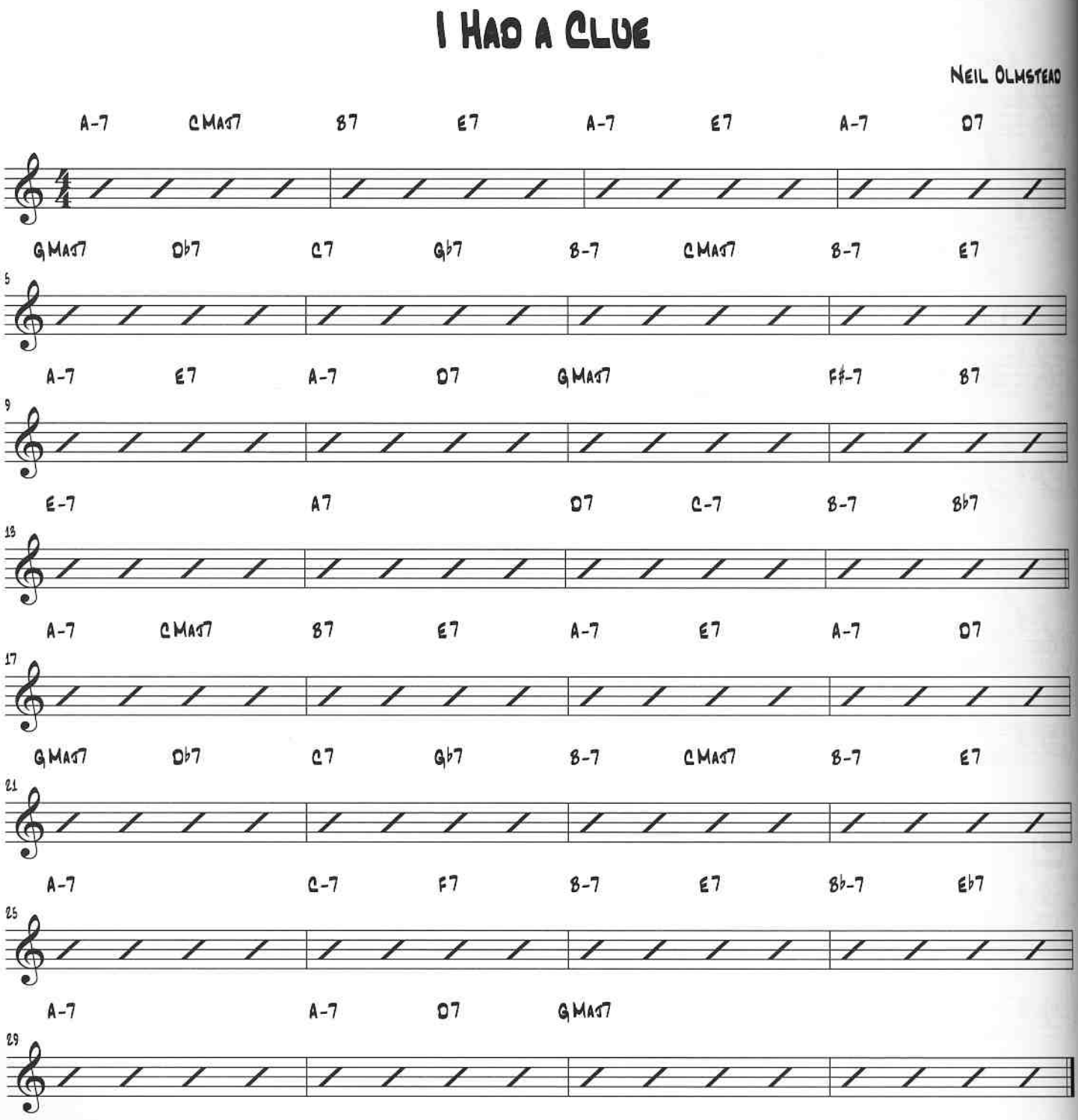
Neil Olmstead




A-7 CMaj7 B7 E7 A-7 E7 A-7 D7
17
GMaj7 Db7 C7 Gb7 B-7 CMaj7 B-7 E7
21
A-7 C-7 F7 B-7 E7 Bb-7 Eb7
25
2nd time to Coda
A-7 A-7 D7 GMaj7 C7 B7 Bb7
29
G
33

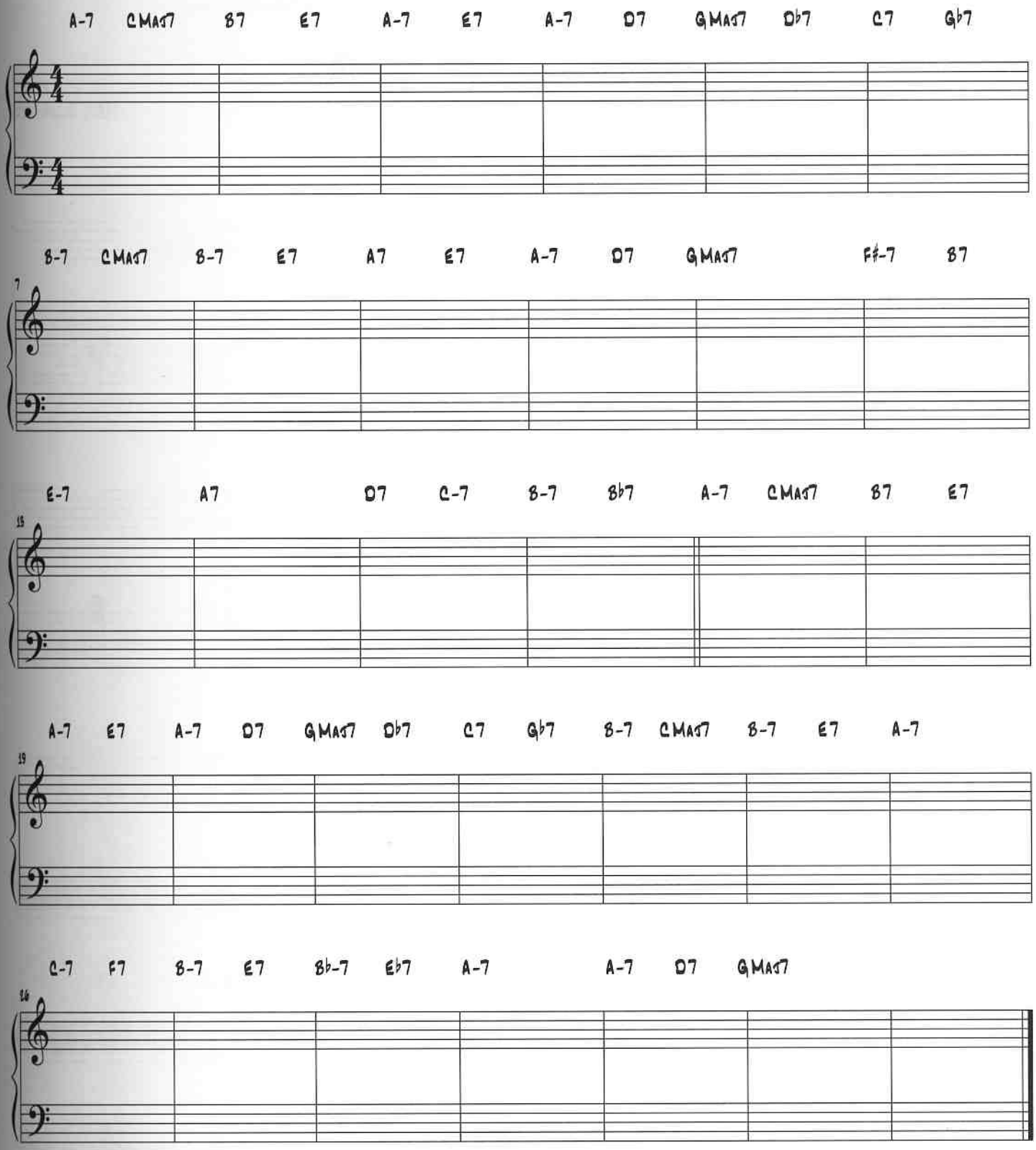
Chord Chart. "I Had a Clue"

Create your own comping part to this tune by writing out the voicings with tension substitutions as appropriate. Move your top voice primarily by step or common tone. Give priority to the rhythmic phrasing. As discussed earlier, this type of lead sheet that shows just the chords is sometimes called a "chord chart." A blank version follows for you to write out your part.



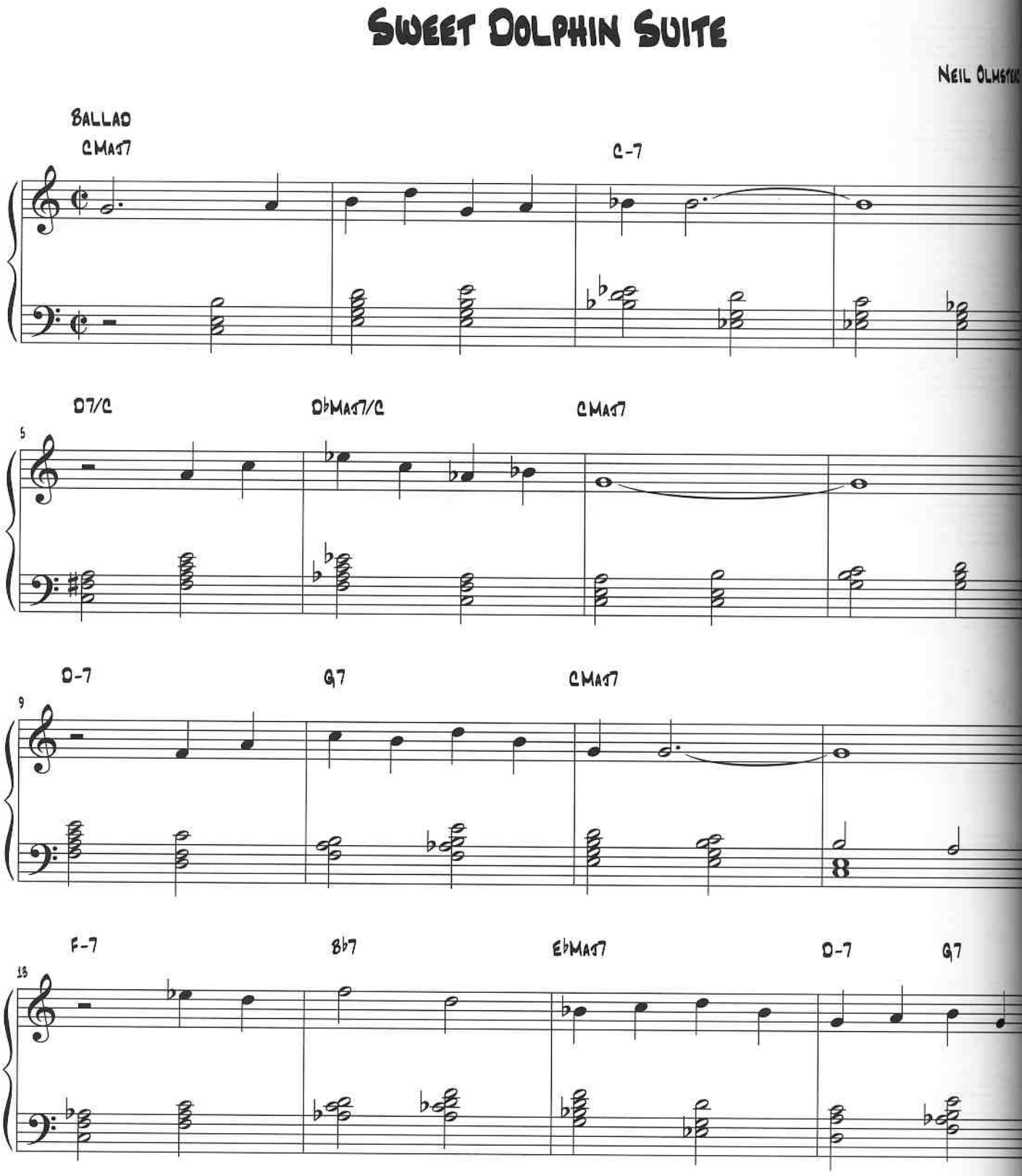
I Had a Clue

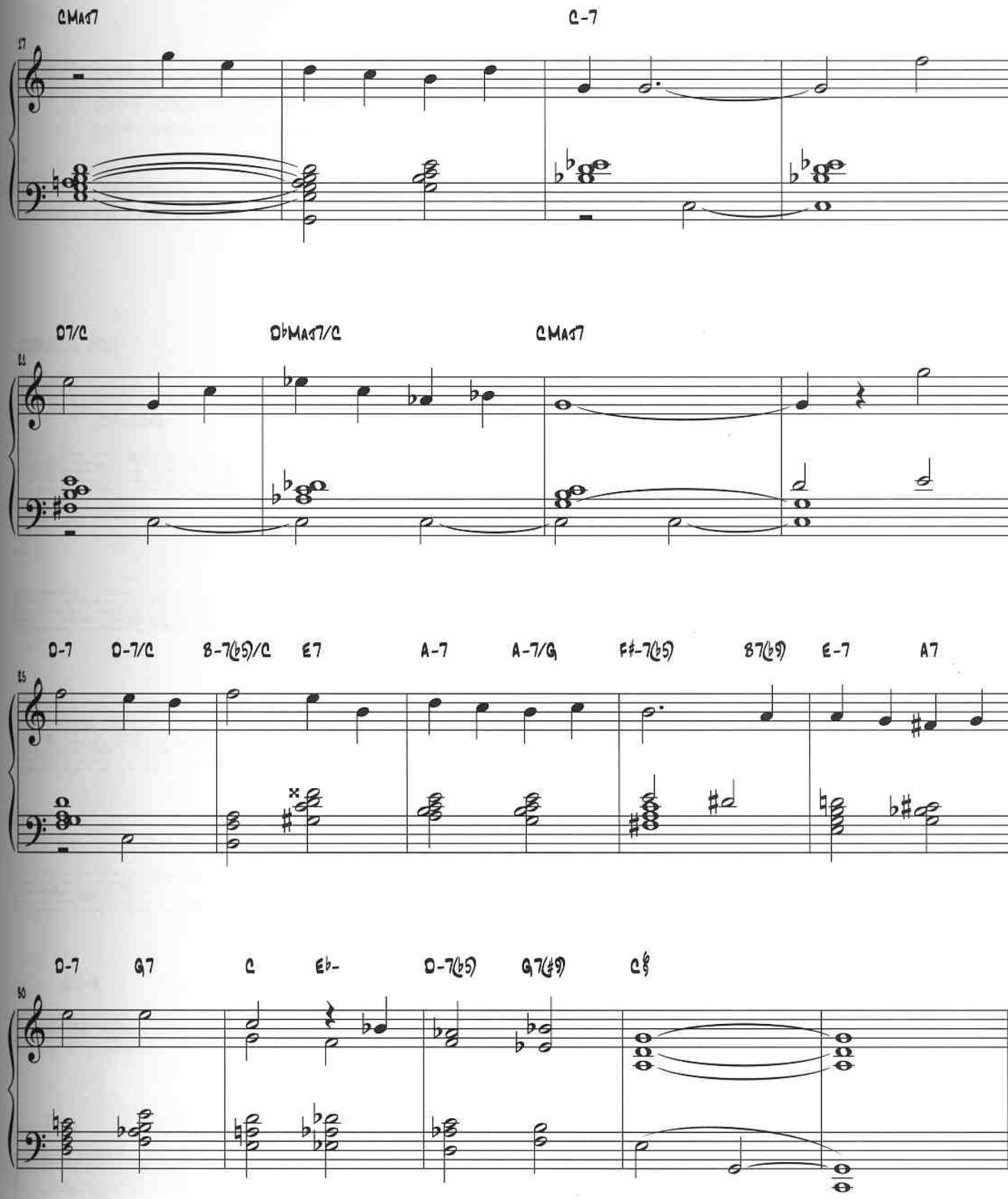
Neil Olmstead



Etude. "Sweet Dolphin Suite"

"Sweet Dolphin Suite" is based on the chord changes to "Green Dolphin Street" by Kaper/Washington. This etude demonstrates a variety of left-hand voicings with tensions in different inversions. Note the smooth voice leading to the new harmonies.




CMAJ7
C-7
17
D7/C
DbMAJ7/C
CMAJ7
21
D-7
D-7/C
B-7(b5)/C
E7
A-7
A-7/G
F#-7(b5)
B7(b9)
E-7
A7
25
D-7
G7
C
Eb-
D-7(b5)
G7(#9)
C6
30

Lead Sheet. "Sweet Dolphin Suite"

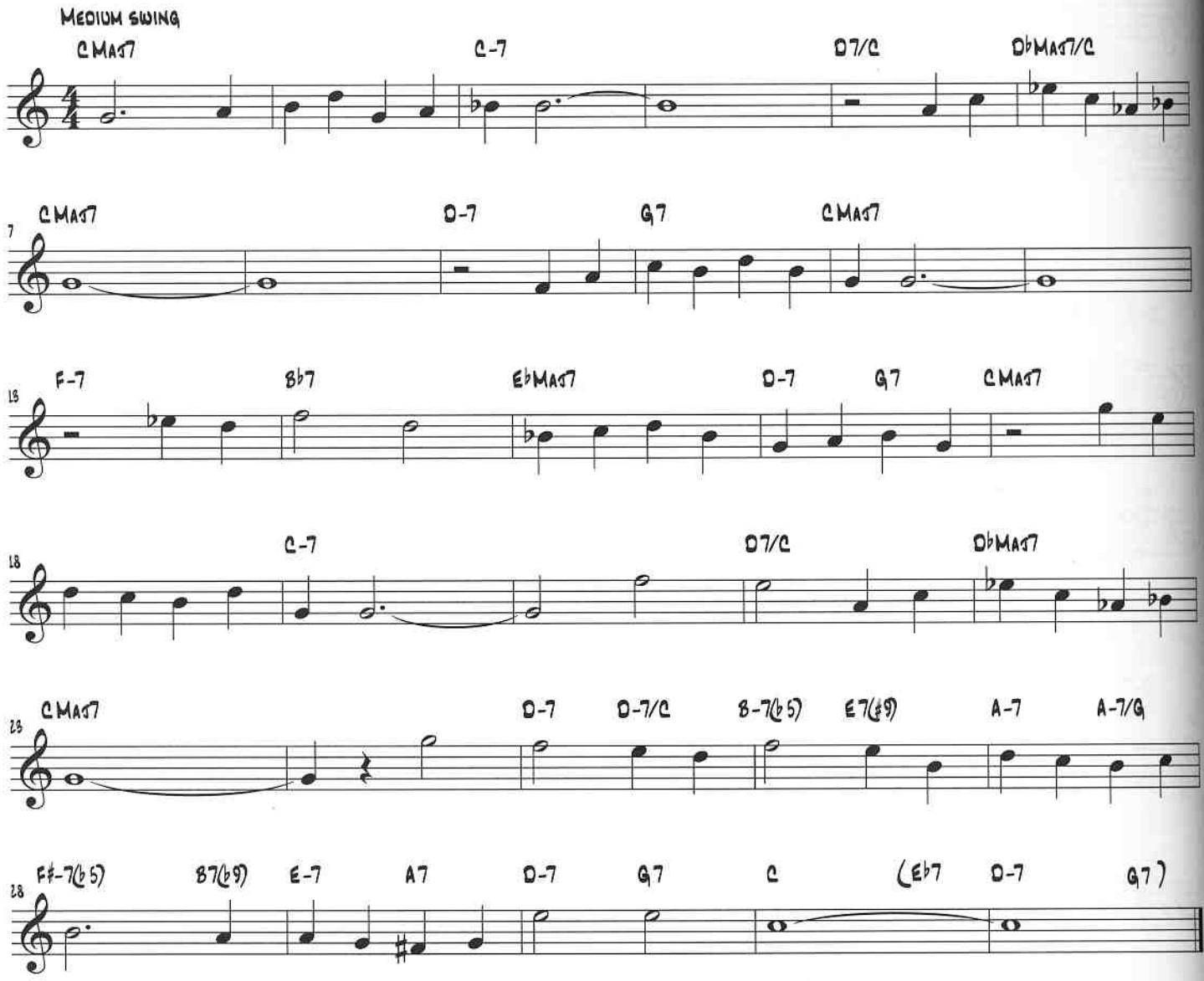
2

Using tensions in your voicings, create your own comping part in the left hand. Voice lead smoothly to the new chords. Syncopate the melody freely and, in a medium swing groove, rhythmicize your left-hand comping.

Note that the tune ends with chords in parentheses. This point is called a *turnaround*, as the form "turns around" back to the beginning. Play these chords when you are returning to the top, but not when you are ending the tune.

Sweet Dolphin Suite

Neil Olmstead



PART II. BASS LINES

Now that you've reviewed the harmonic language of jazz, it's time to look at how to play bass lines in the left hand. Walking bass lines came into prominence in the 1940s. In solo and duo settings where bassists were not present, pianists have often felt inspired to play walking bass lines. Pianists such as Lennie Tristano and Dave McKenna have explored this concept deeply, and are leaders in the field. Today, solo jazz pianists often use this technique, finding it provides a subtle driving impetus to their improvisations without the weightiness of chords.

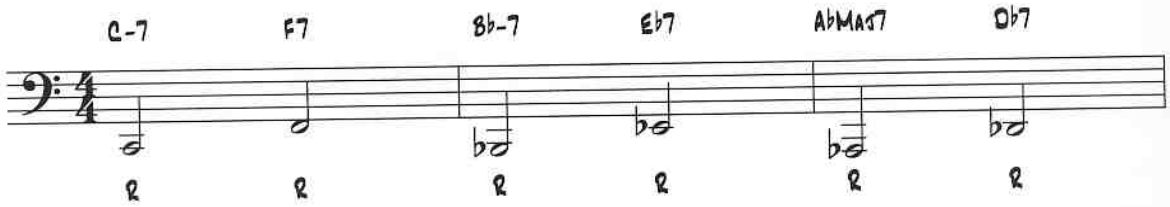
Part II explores this linear concept in a codified, graduated manner, to help you master the fundamentals of contrapuntal improvisation. These exercises and etudes will help prepare you to improvise bass lines while playing the melody, comping, and soloing.

Chapter 3. Half-Note Motives

THEORY

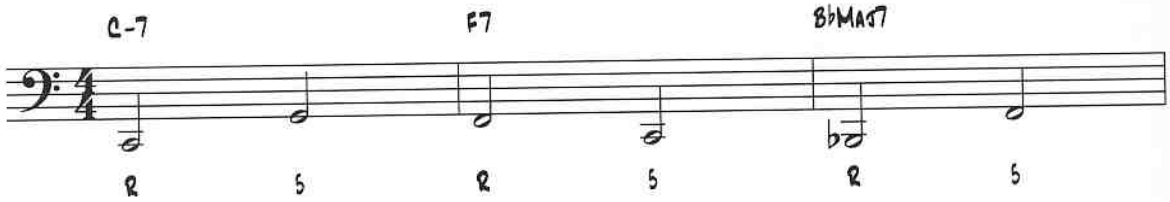
A common motive in cut-time and ballad (2/2) playing is the *half-note motive.* The simplest form is to have the chord root on every half note. This is used when the chord changes every two beats.

Roots Only



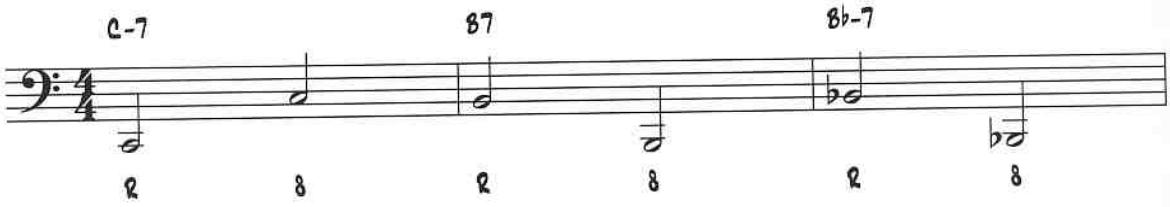
The most important and commonly used half-note motive is the *root-five,* where the root is on beat 1 and the fifth is on beat 3. It is used when the chord changes every measure.

Root-Five

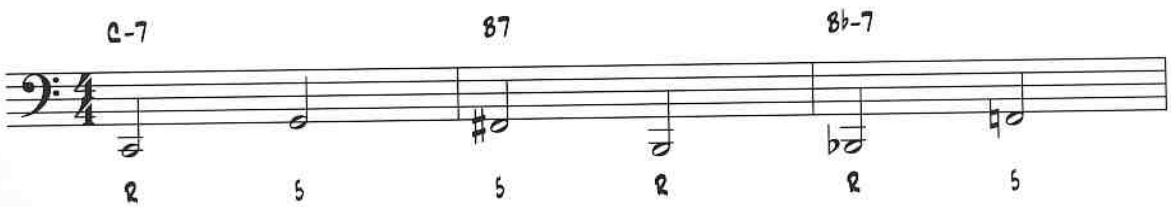


When the chord changes every measure, you can also use *root-octave* or *root-five-five-root:*

Root-Octave

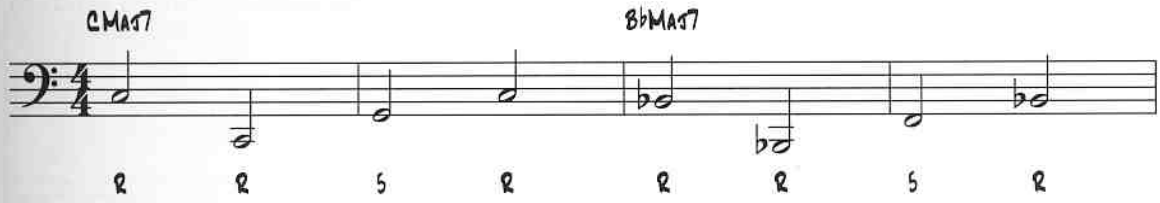


Root-Five-Five-Root



When the chord changes every two measures, you can use a combination of motives.

Combination



Eventually, you will use a combination of these in all circumstances. Your choice will depend on the harmonic progression and the line you wish to develop. As you become familiar with the most common motives, your flexibility at improvising alternate motives will increase.

Tips

1. Keep your left-hand line basic so that it offers strong support for your right hand. Remember, it is an accompaniment to an improvisation.
2. Become fluent on the root-five motive. It is used most often, and learning it will help you learn the others.

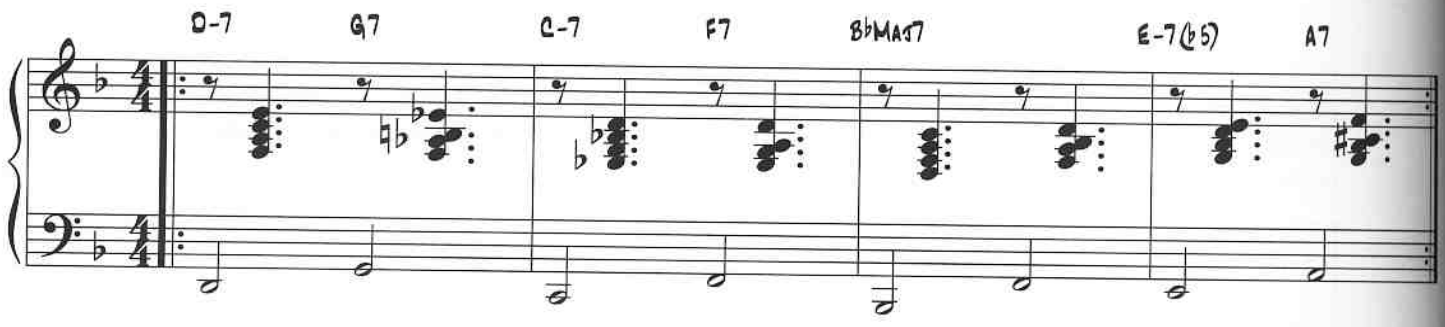
PRACTICE

Bass Line Practice

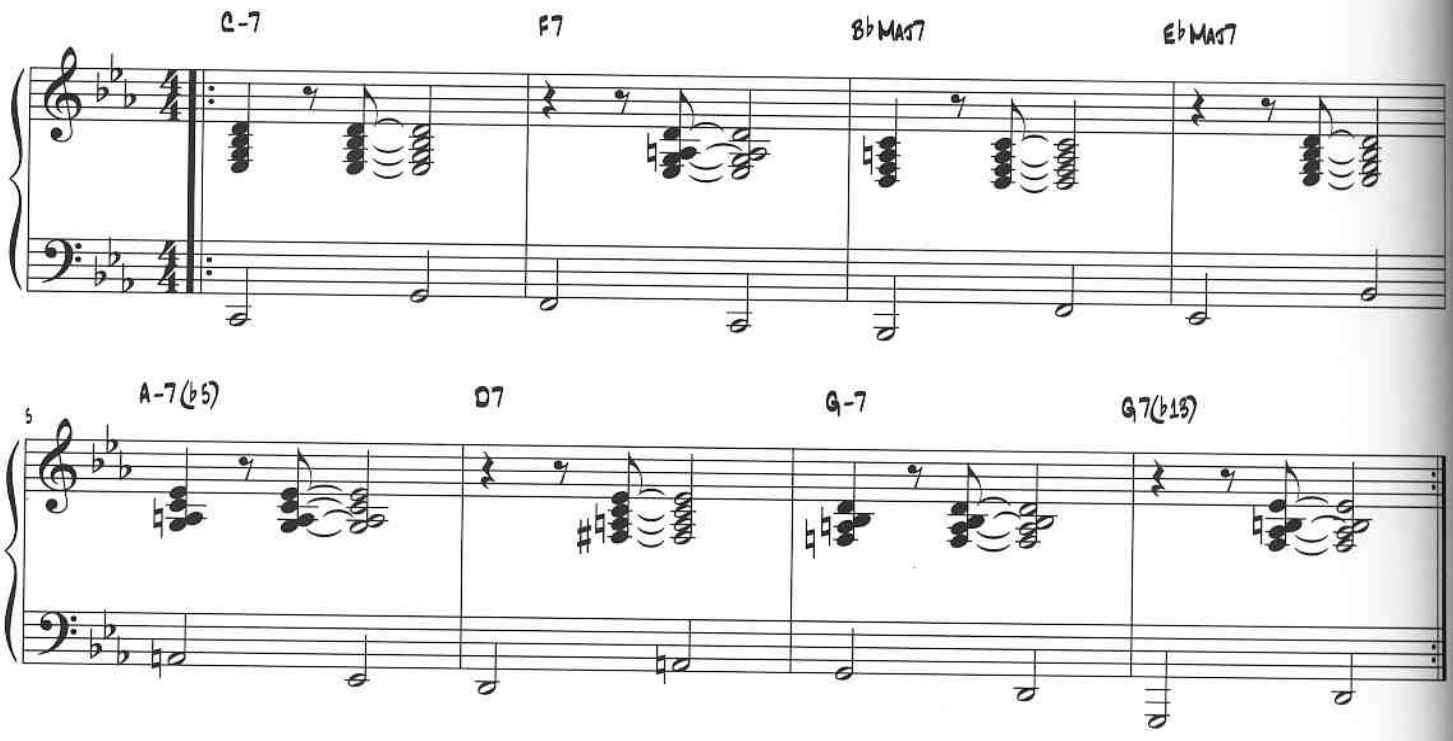
The bass lines in the following exercises are built primarily from the different kinds of half-note motives. Practice each line until you can play it easily.

1. Practice each bass line by itself.
2. Add the right-hand comping part.

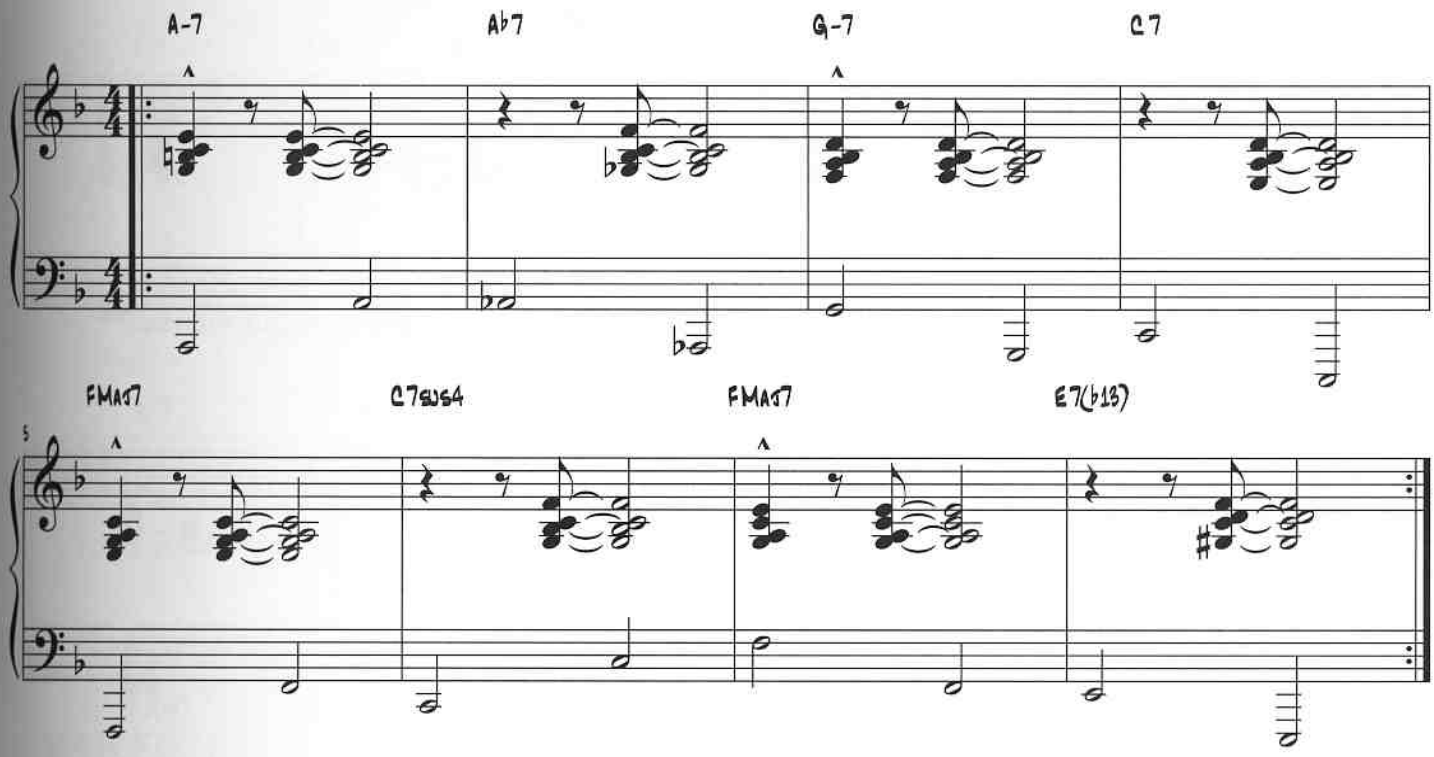
Exercise 1. Roots Only



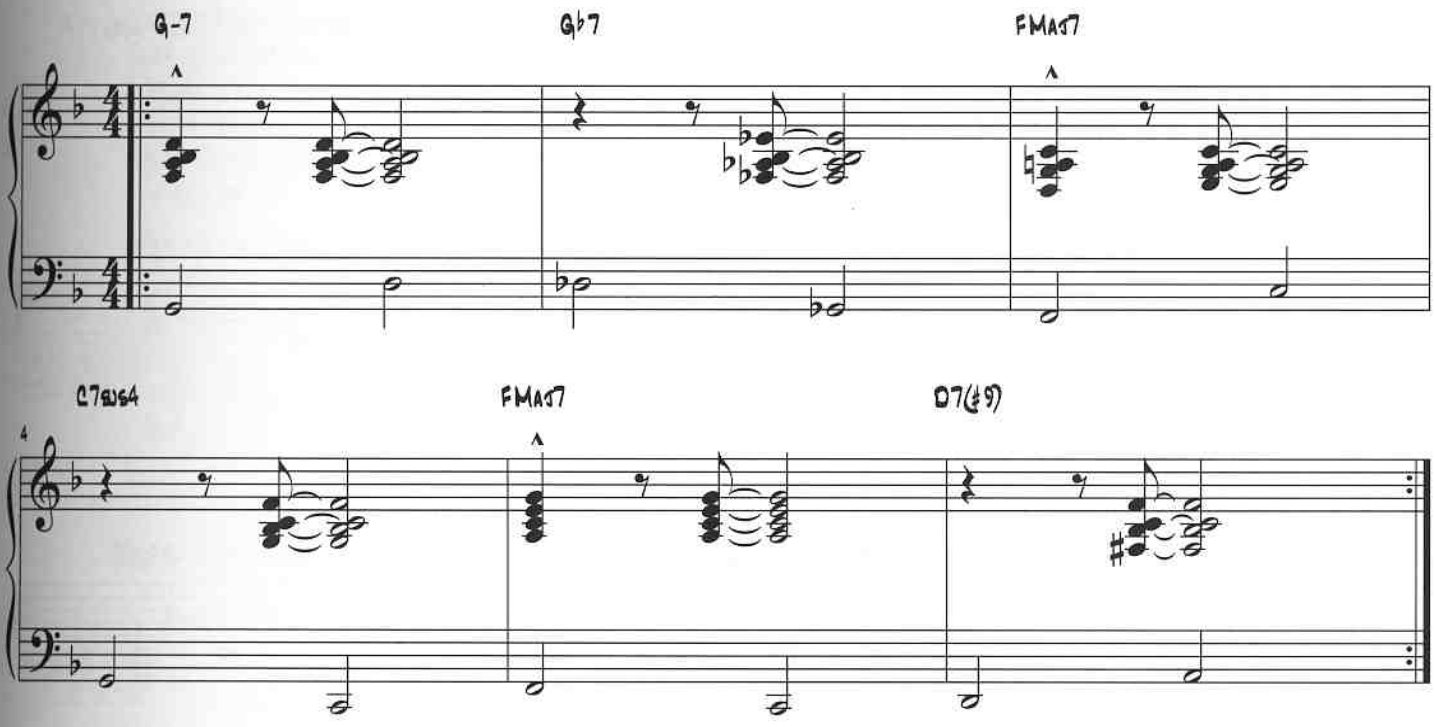
Exercise 2. Root-Five



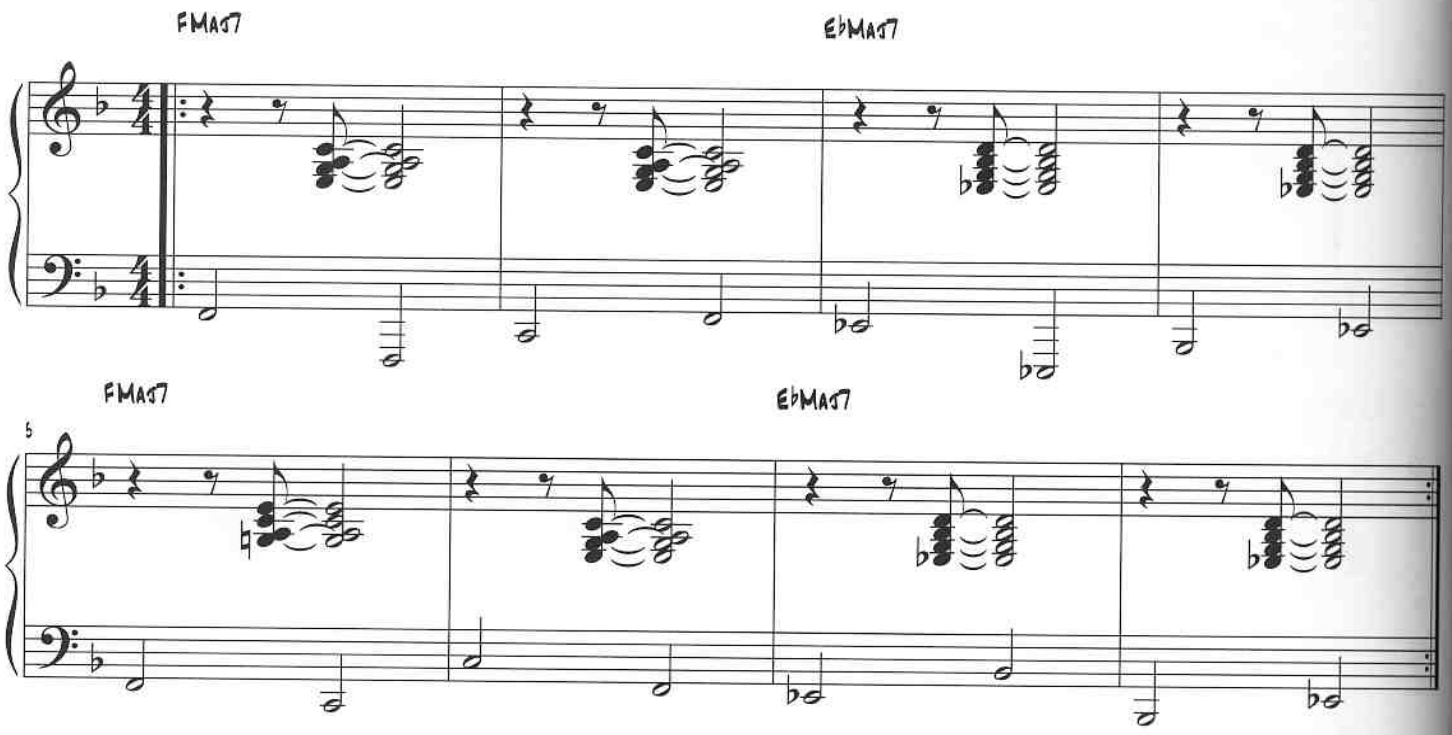
Exercise 3. Root-Octave



Exercise 4. Root-Five-Five-Root



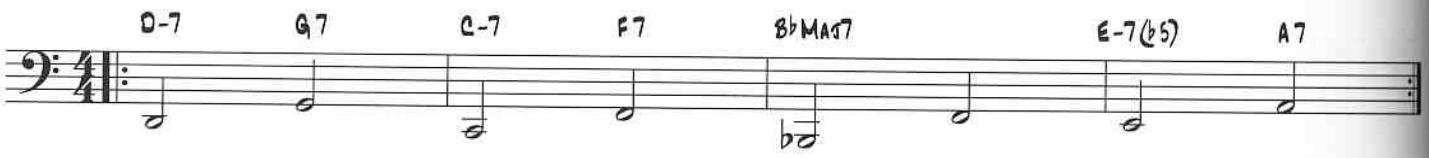
Exercise 5. Combination



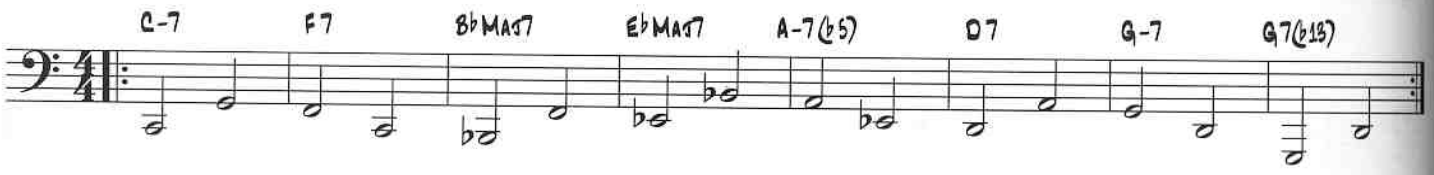
Comping Practice

Create your own right-hand comping part over each set of chord changes (see chapters 1 and 2). Practice them along with the given bass lines. Focus on voice leading and rhythmic drive. Try different tempos.

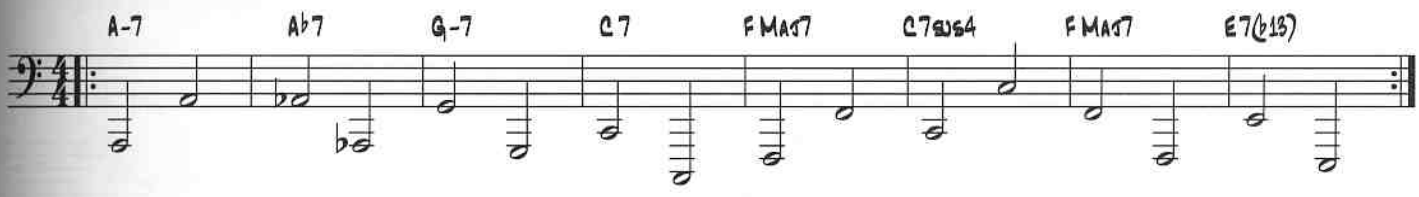
Exercise 1. Comping: Roots Only



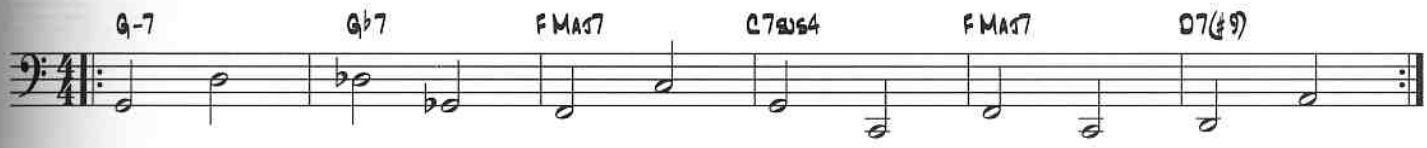
Exercise 2. Comping: Root-Five



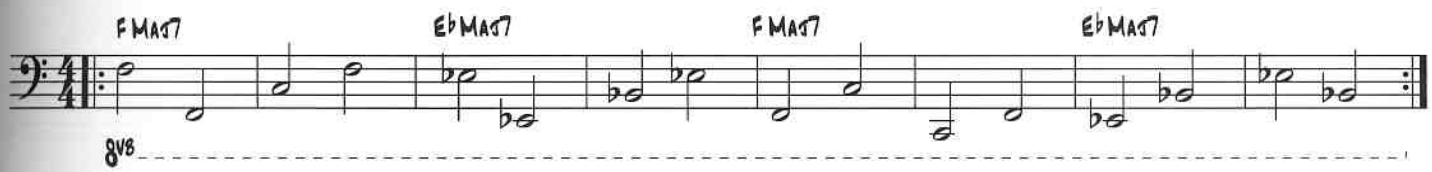
Exercise 3. Comping: Root-Octave



Exercise 4. Comping: Root-Five-Five-Root



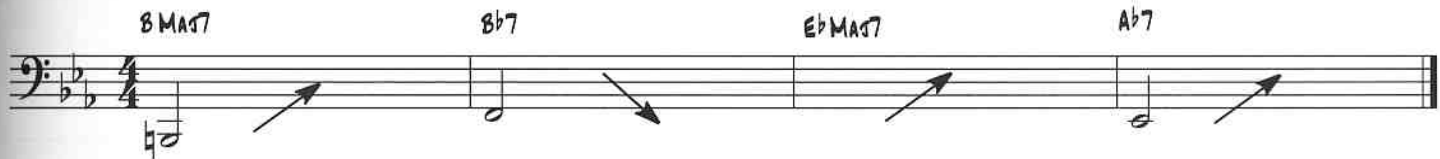
Exercise 5. Comping: Combination



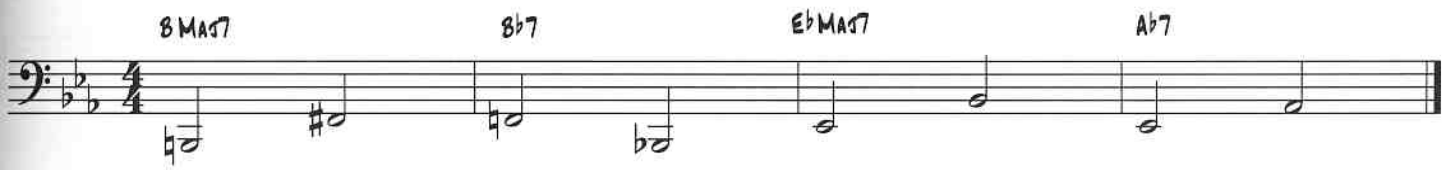
Arrow Sheet: "A Night At Play"

Create your own half-note motive bass line to the tune "A Night At Play" using the arrow sheet as a guide. Your primary goal is to play the chord root on the first beat of each chord. Play the appropriate root or fifth, depending on the melodic direction of the arrow.

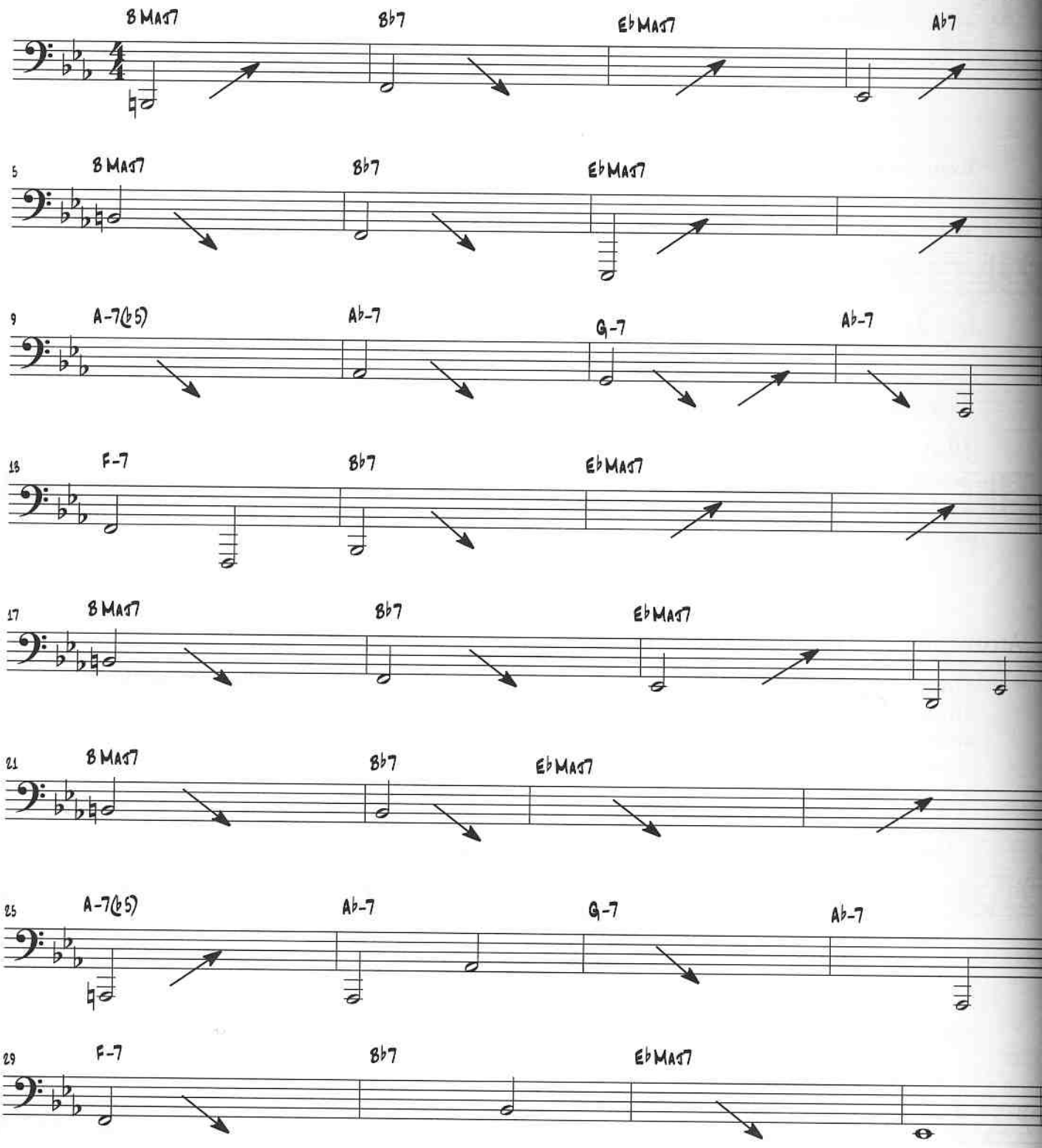
The arrow sheet looks like this:



Your completed bass line should look something like this:



Try to create a smooth line. When you are done, compare the line you created to the written bass line in the etude, "A Night At Play." They should be similar, or even exactly the same. Notice the use of the various half-note motives shown at the beginning of this chapter.



TUNES

Etude. "A Night At Play"

"A Night At Play" is based on the chord changes to Cole Porter tune "Night and Day." It illustrates the half-note motive as used in a ballad feel (2/2).

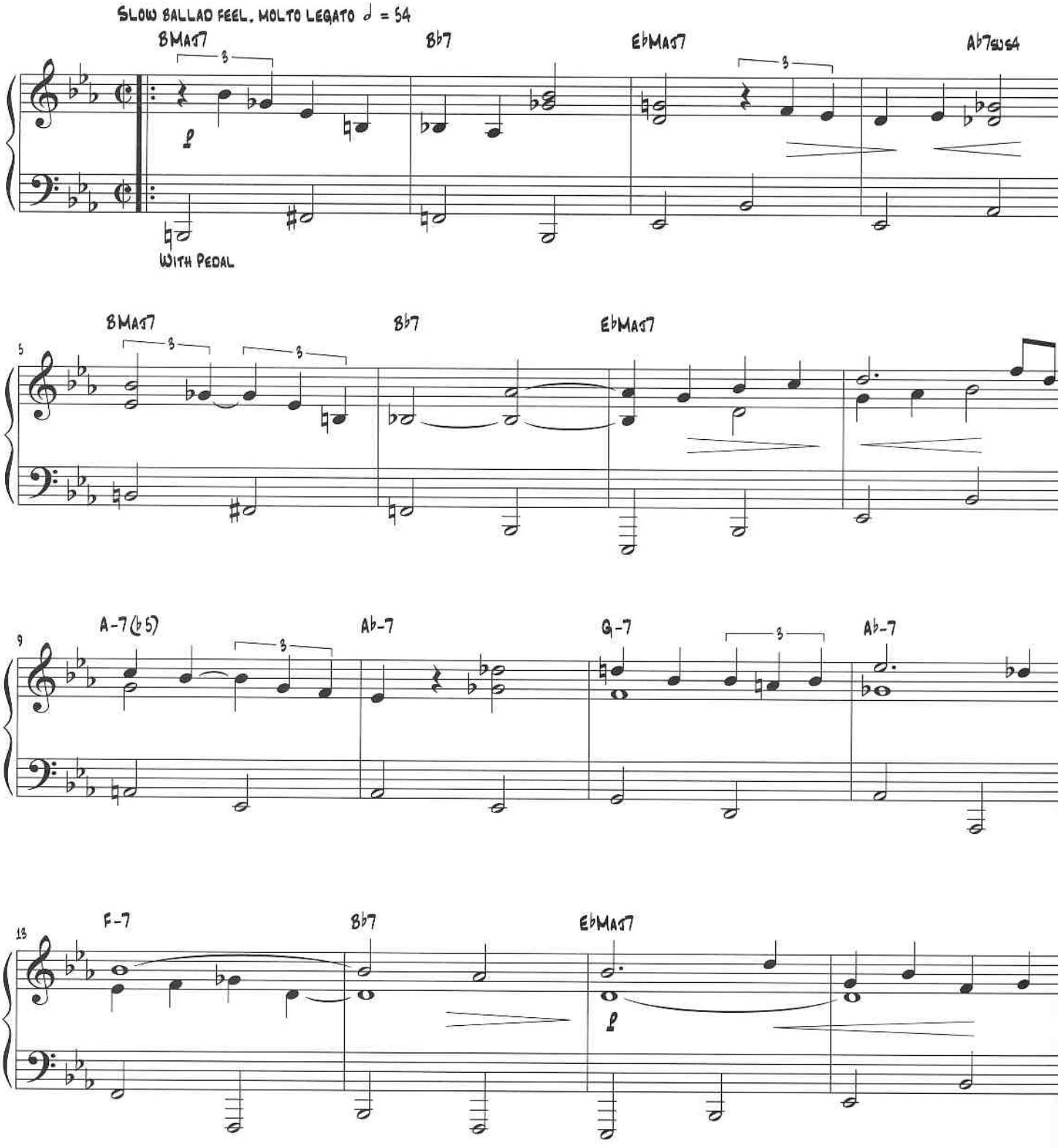
Play this tune with deep legato and straight eighth notes, thus rendering a *two* feel. After playing it straight, play it again, swinging the eighth notes in the last eight measures. You'll find the pulse naturally gravitating toward a *four* feel at the end.

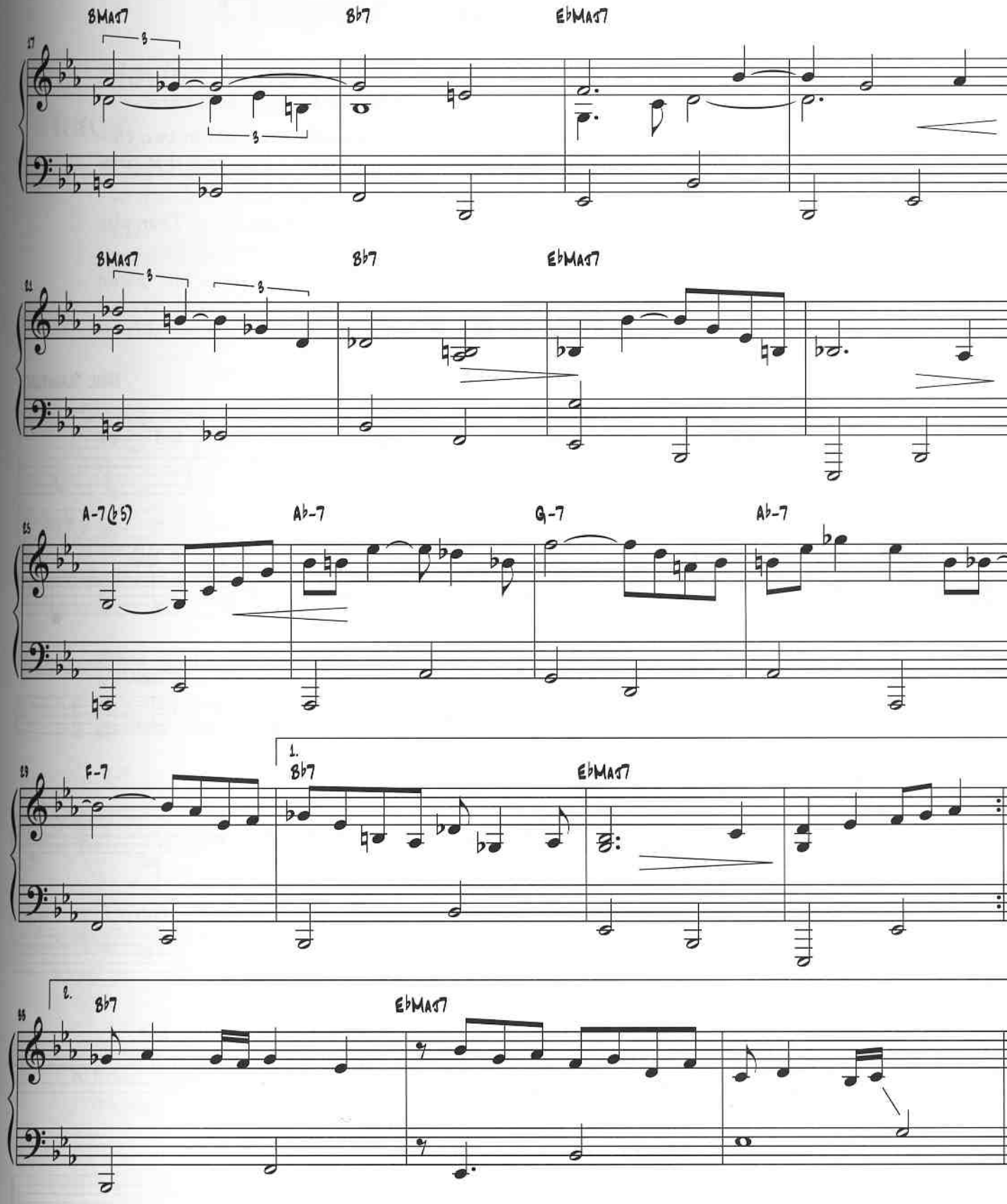
Note the three-part texture is interspersed throughout this tune (e.g., mm. 6–9). A slow tempo augmented by a *third voice* below the melody, or harmonized with right-hand voicings, is usually richer and more convincingly ballad-like. Also, note the range and contour of the bass line. What are its highest and lowest notes?

These techniques should be used in your own arrangements.

A Night At Play

Neil Olmste



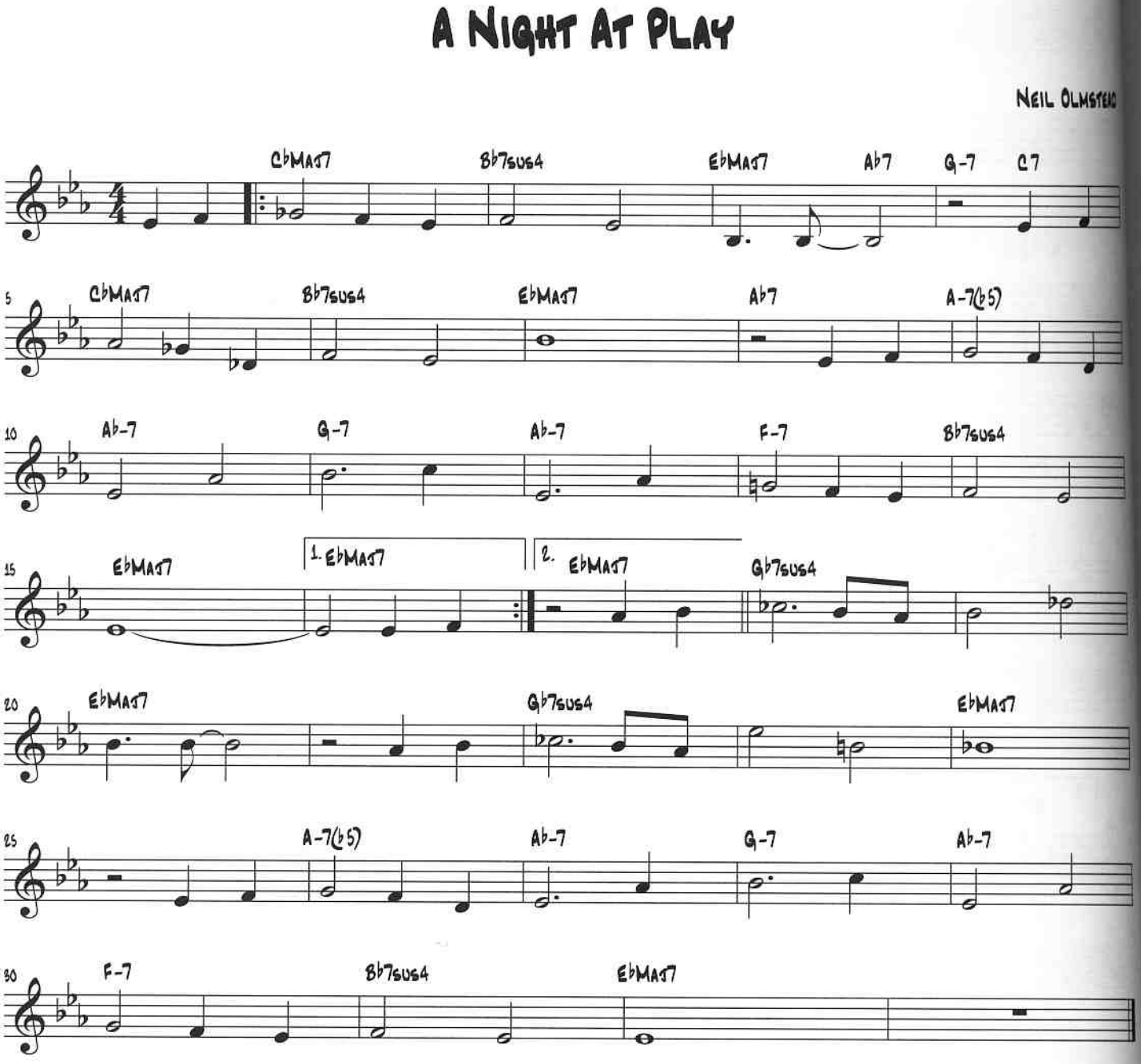

17
BMaj7
B♭7
E♭Maj7
21
BMaj7
B♭7
E♭Maj7
25
A-7(♭5)
A♭-7
G-7
A♭-7
29
F-7
1.
B♭7
E♭Maj7
33
2.
B♭7
E♭Maj7

Lead Sheet. "A Night At Play"

3

Create your own arrangement to "A Night At Play." Use the CD as a reference.

1. Use each type of half-note motive as frequently as possible throughout two choruses of the tune. Then play another chorus, and improvise a bass line that combines these motives.
2. Play the tune as a ballad (2/2), using straight eighths in the right hand. Then play it as a swing (4/4) tune, syncopating the melody and swinging the eighths.



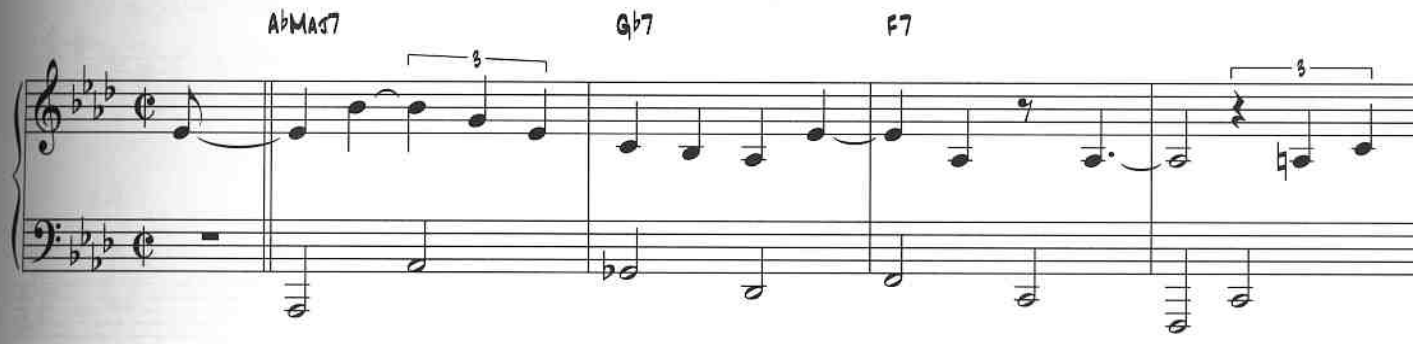
Chapter 4. Ballad to Swing

Moving from a half-time feel to a quarter-time feel

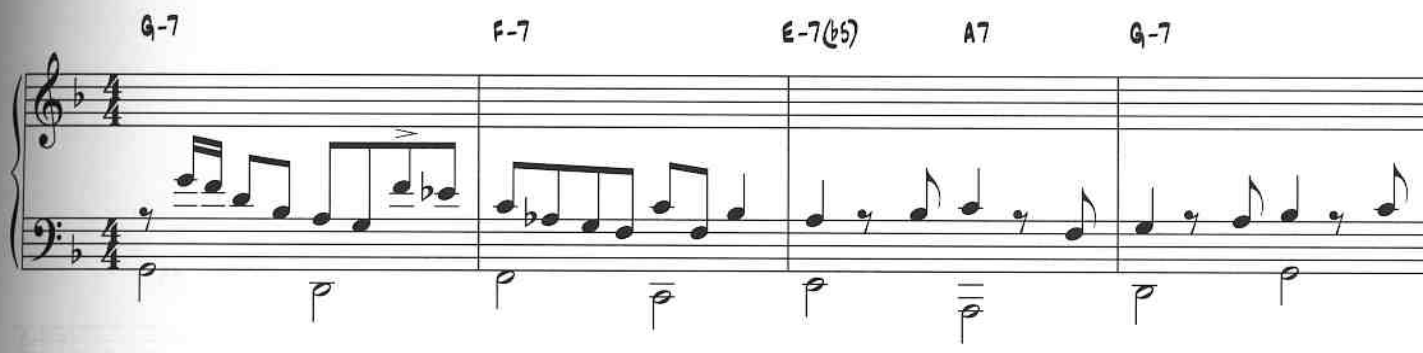
THEORY

As we've seen in the previous chapter, half-note bass lines are generally expressed in two time feels: ballad and swing.

Ballad or "half-time" feel is characterized by a rhythm of two beats in the measure, strongly rooted in beats 1 and 3. To attain this feel, use long tones, straight eighth notes, and quarter-note triplets in your right-hand. Avoid swinging eighth notes. Quarter-note triplets are very helpful in establishing this feel, especially if the ballad feel is being approached from a swing feel.



Swing or "quarter time" feel is characterized by a rhythm of four beats in the measure, with accents on beats 2 and 4. A swing feel can easily move to a walking bass line. To attain a swing feel, give your eighth notes a lilting swing. The feel will naturally gravitate toward a subtle accent on beats 2 and 4.



Shifting from one feel to another usually occurs after a groove has been fully established. Sometimes, 32 measures or more of ballad will then give way to swing. "Flora," on page 50, illustrates this in measure 16, when the shift from ballad to swing occurs.

PRACTICE

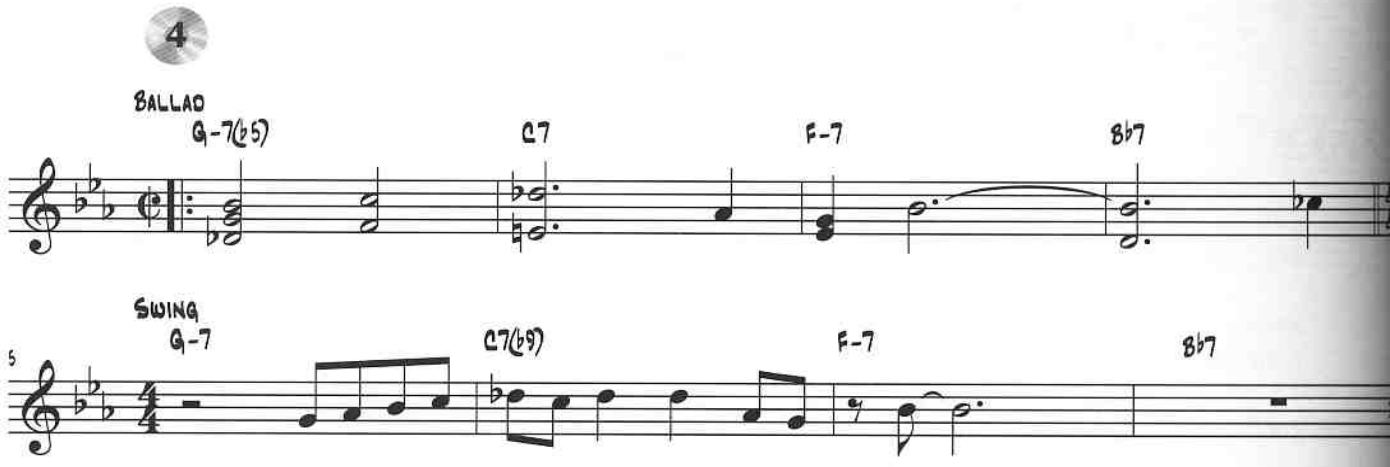
Shifting Time Feels

These short examples will give you practice modulating between ballad and swing. In actual song arrangements, these shifts generally occur over longer musical sections—16 or 32 measures, or even several choruses.

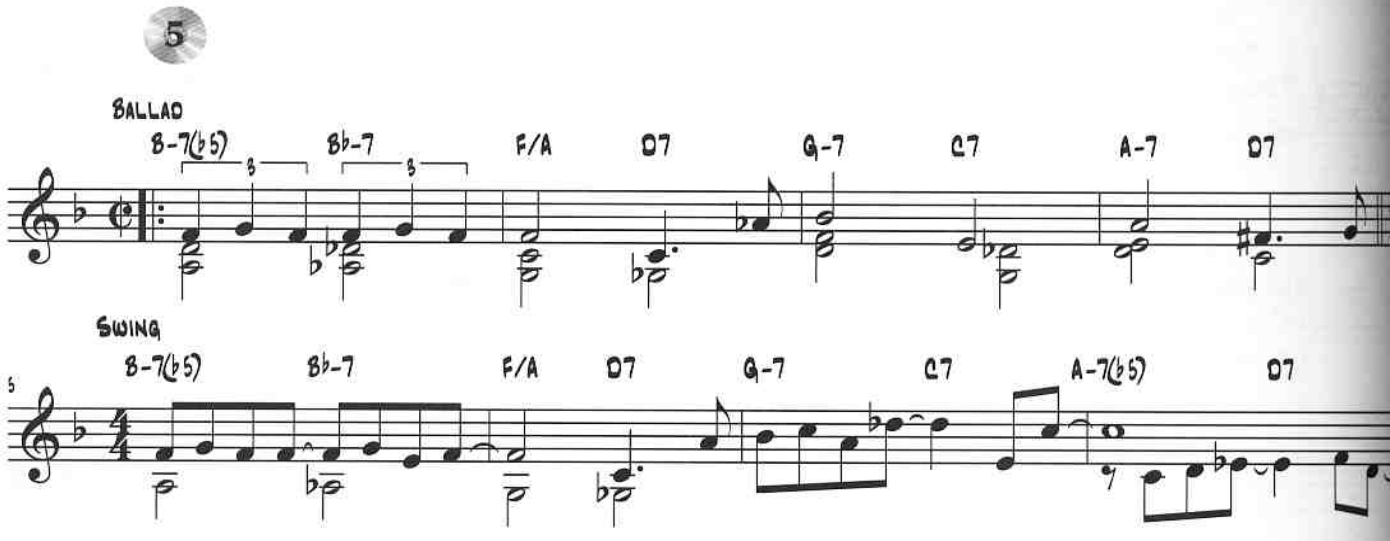
Each exercise begins as a ballad and then shifts to swing. At first, play them without following the written repeats.

1. First, practice the right hand by itself. Notice the change of rhythms when it shifts to swing. Play the eighth notes straight in the ballad sections, but with a swing feel in the swing sections.
2. With your left hand, add a bass line of half-note motives.
3. Practice each exercise until you are comfortable shifting between the two feels.

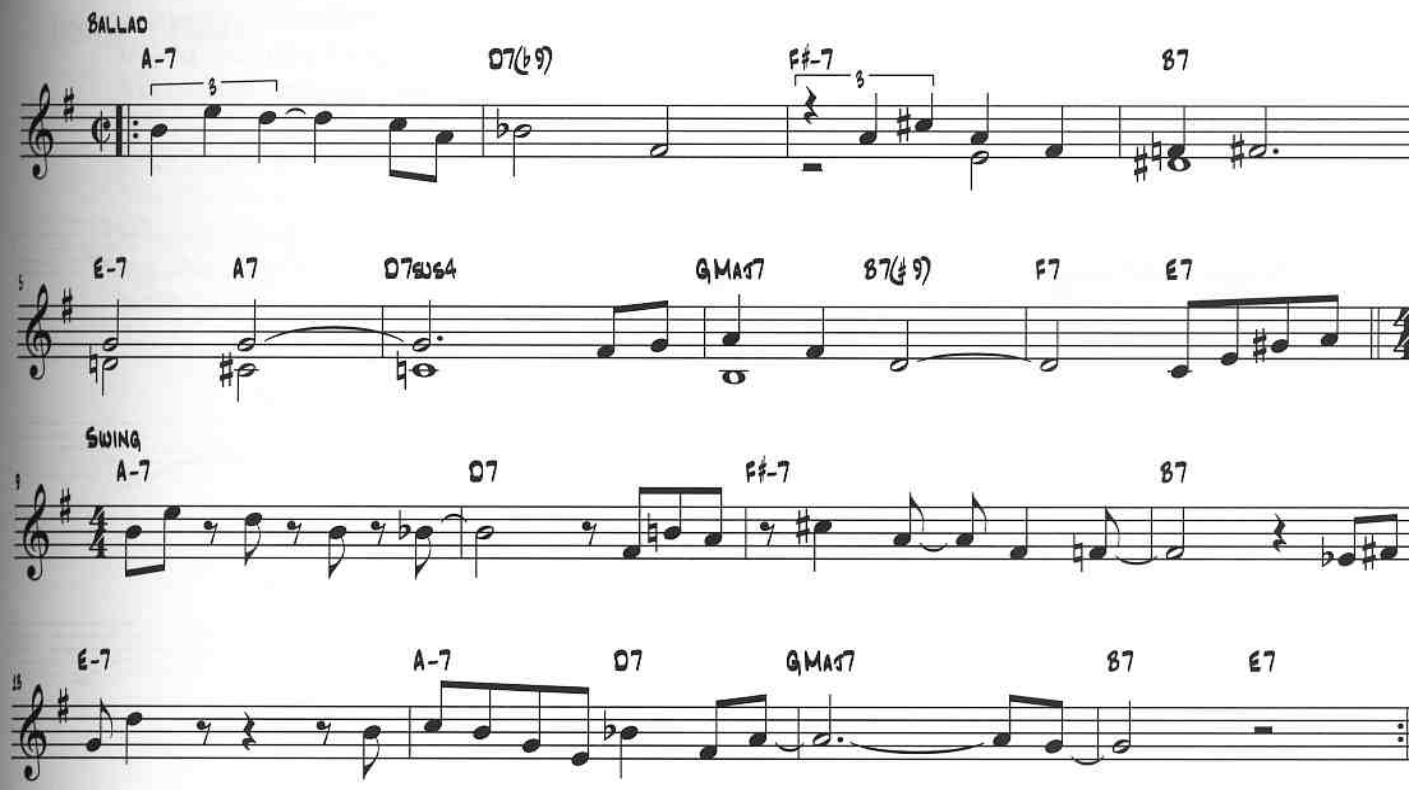
Exercise 1. Shifting Time Feels



Exercise 2. Shifting Time Feels



Exercise 3. Shifting Time Feels

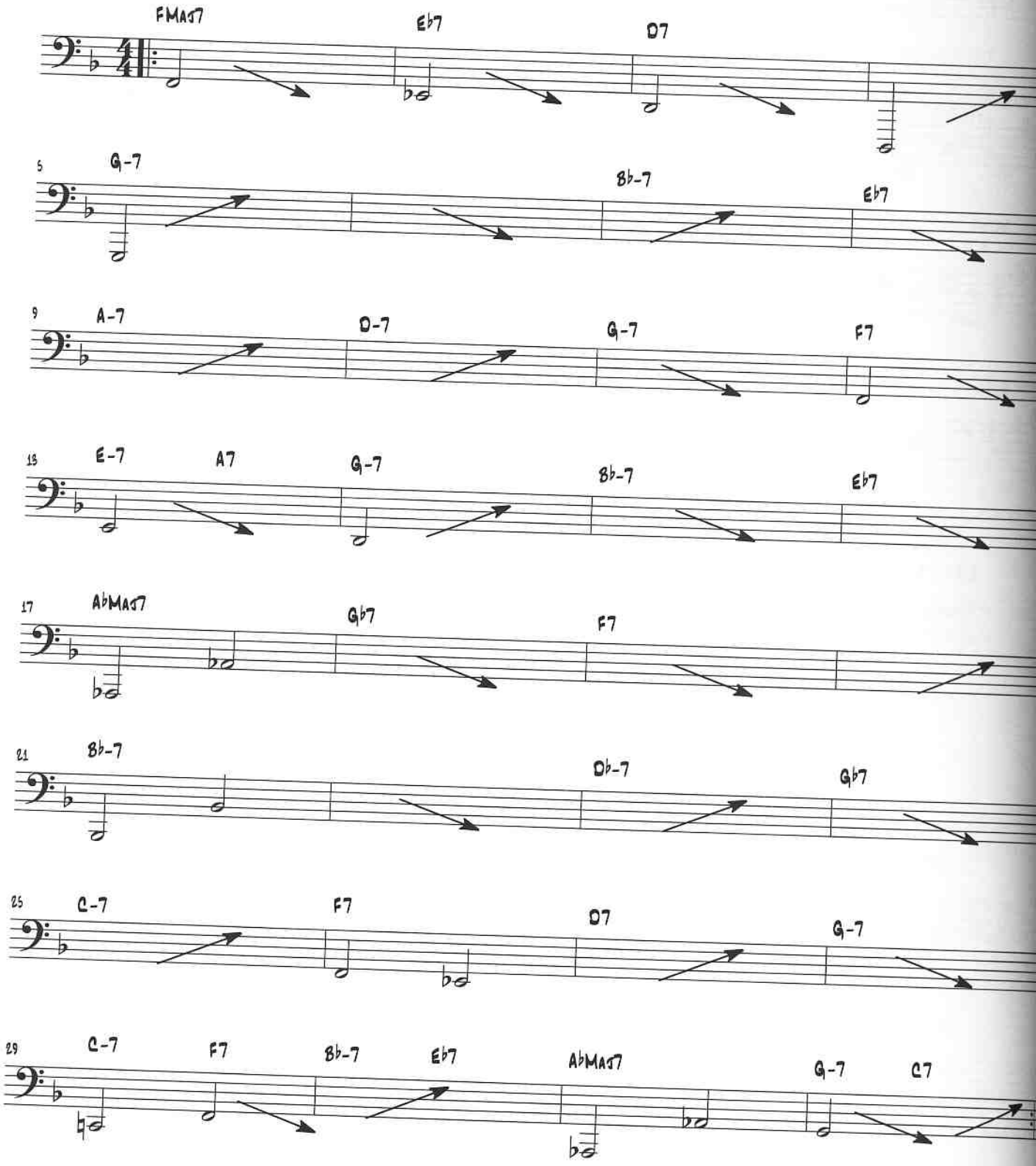


CHALLENGE

When you are comfortable moving from ballad to swing, play each exercise again, but observe the repeats so that you can practice moving from swing to ballad.

Arrow Sheet: "Cabernet"

Play the arrow sheet based on "Cabernet" using half-note motives. Follow the direction of the arrow when playing the missing half notes. Practice this until you can play it easily. Then add a comping part in your right hand. Check your bass line against the etude to "Cabernet." They should be similar.



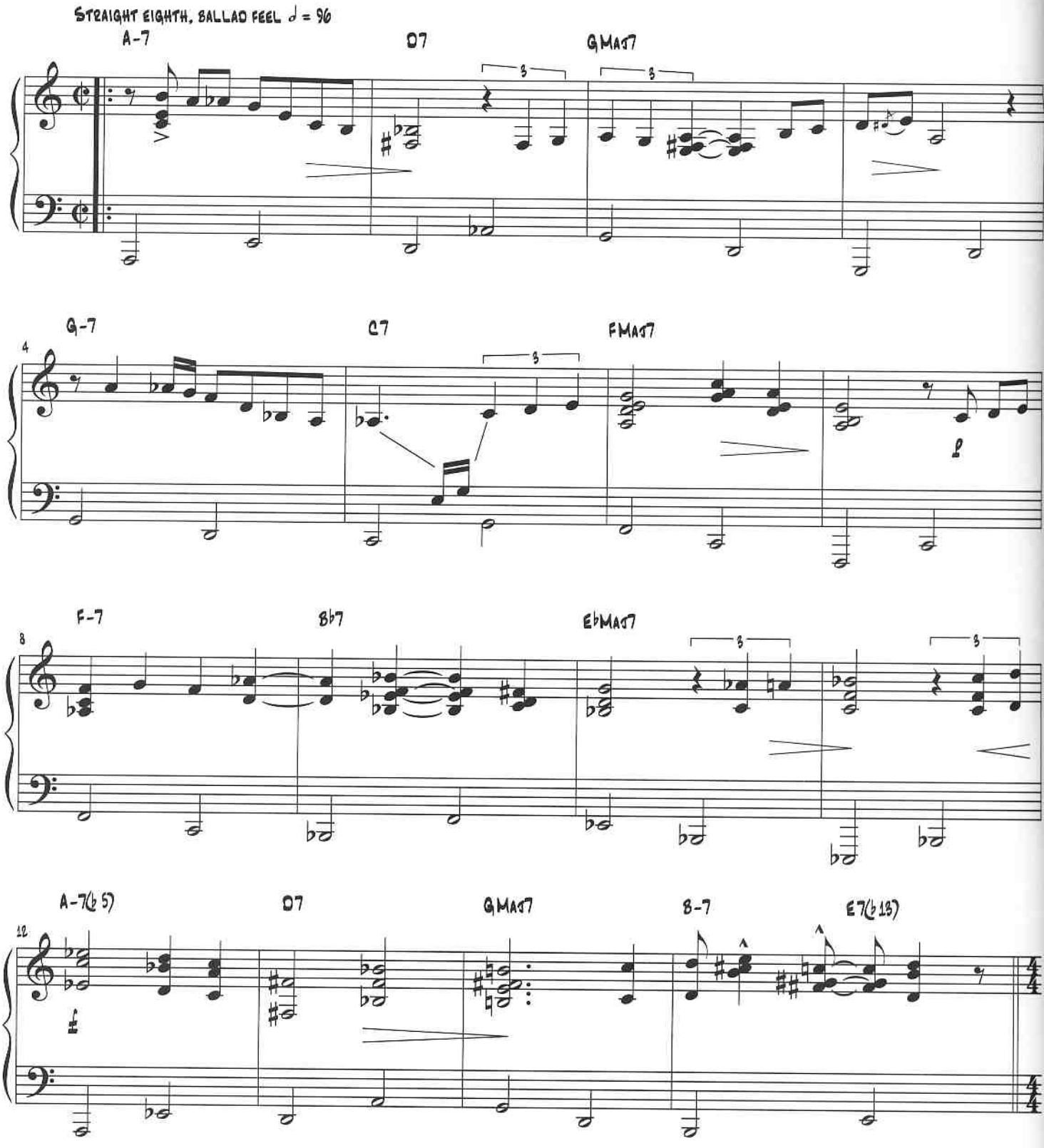
TUNES

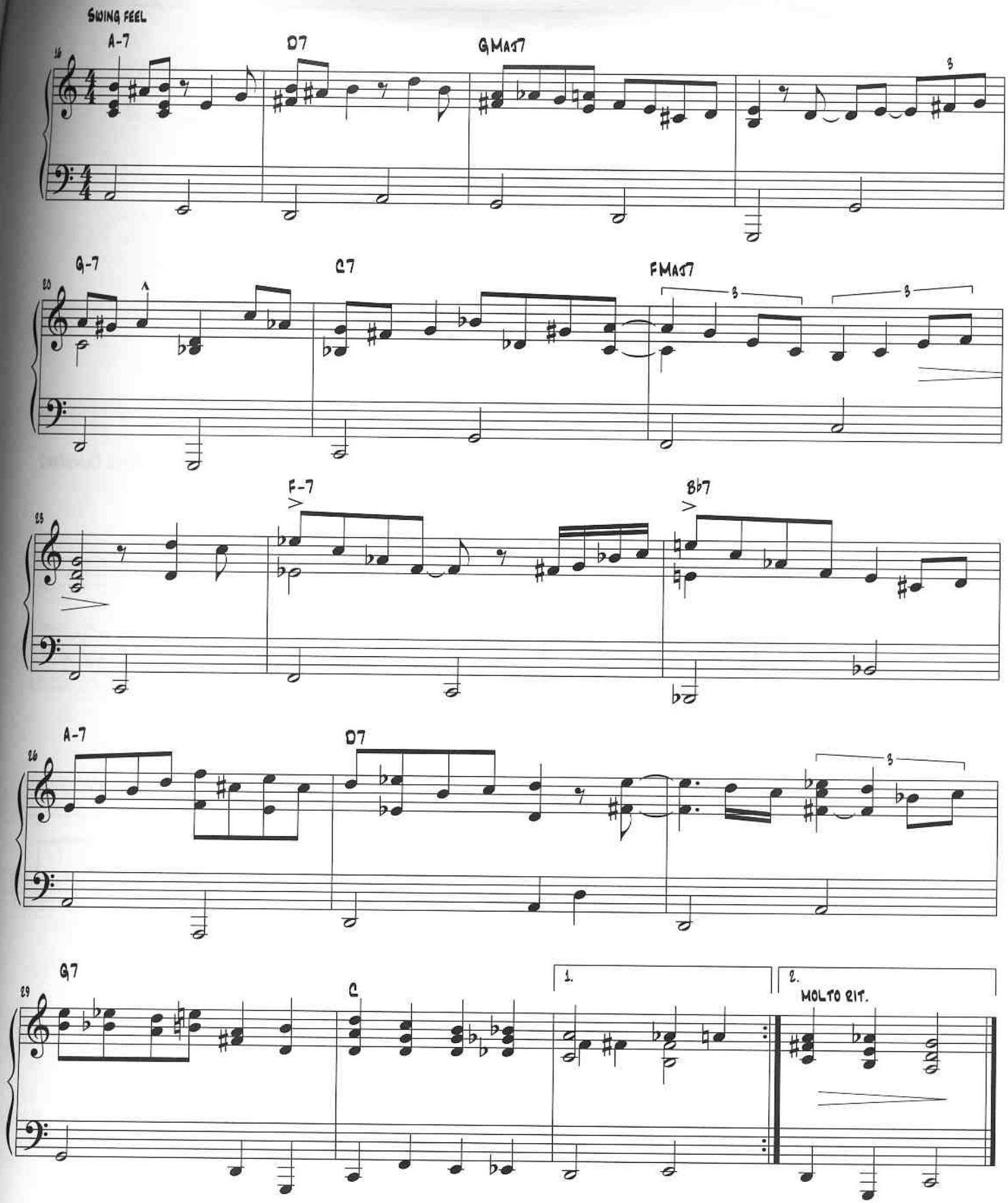
Etude. "Flora"

This etude, based on the chord changes to Johnny Mercer's standard "Laura," moves from ballad to swing with a constant half-note motive in the left hand. The modulation from ballad to swing is much more typical of what you will find in actual arrangements. The shift occurs only after the ballad groove is fully established. Play it as written until you are comfortable with the two time feels. Then, for an added challenge, play it reading the bass line and chord symbols, but improvising the right hand. Shift freely between the two time feels.

FLORA

NEIL OLMSTEAD

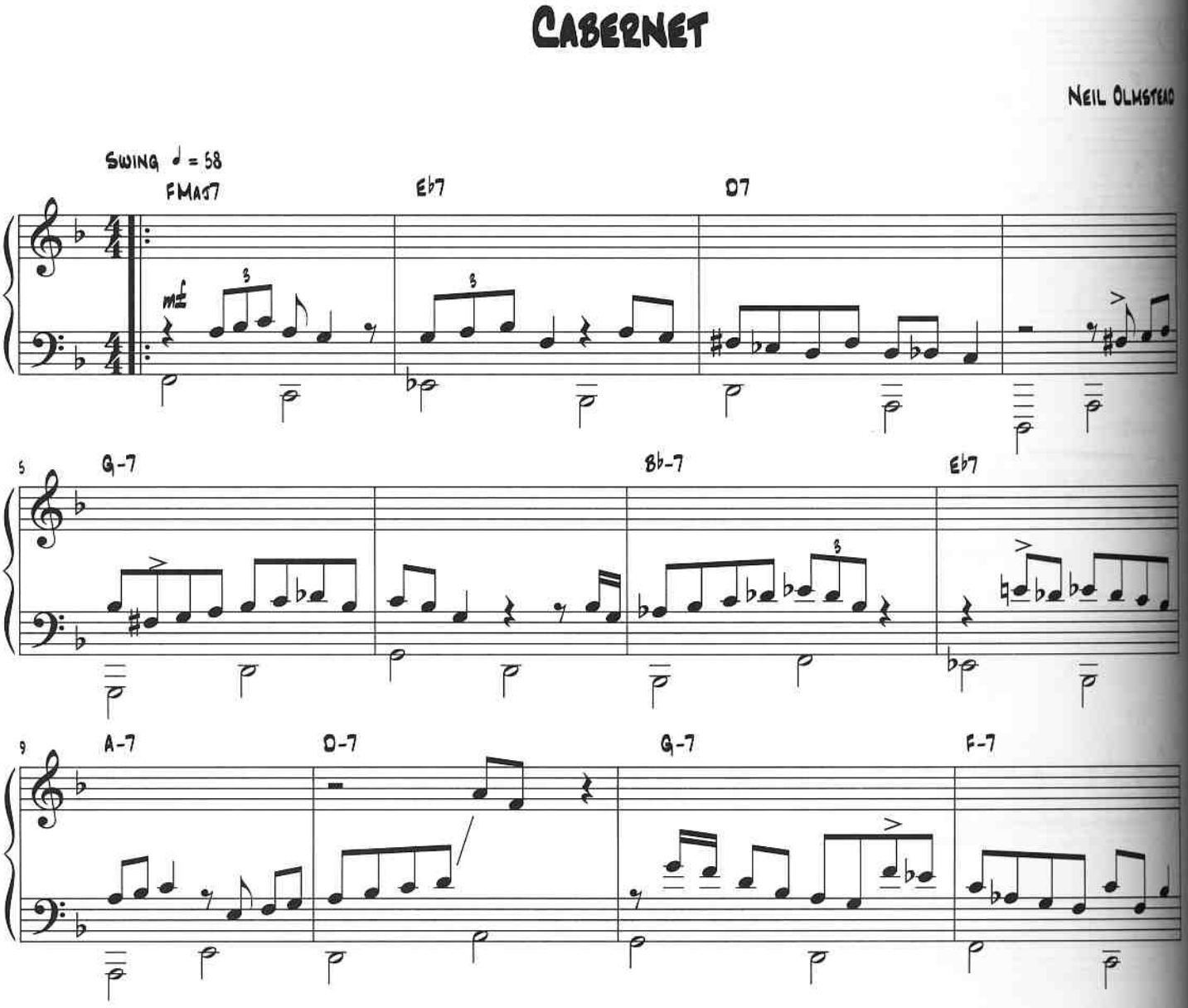


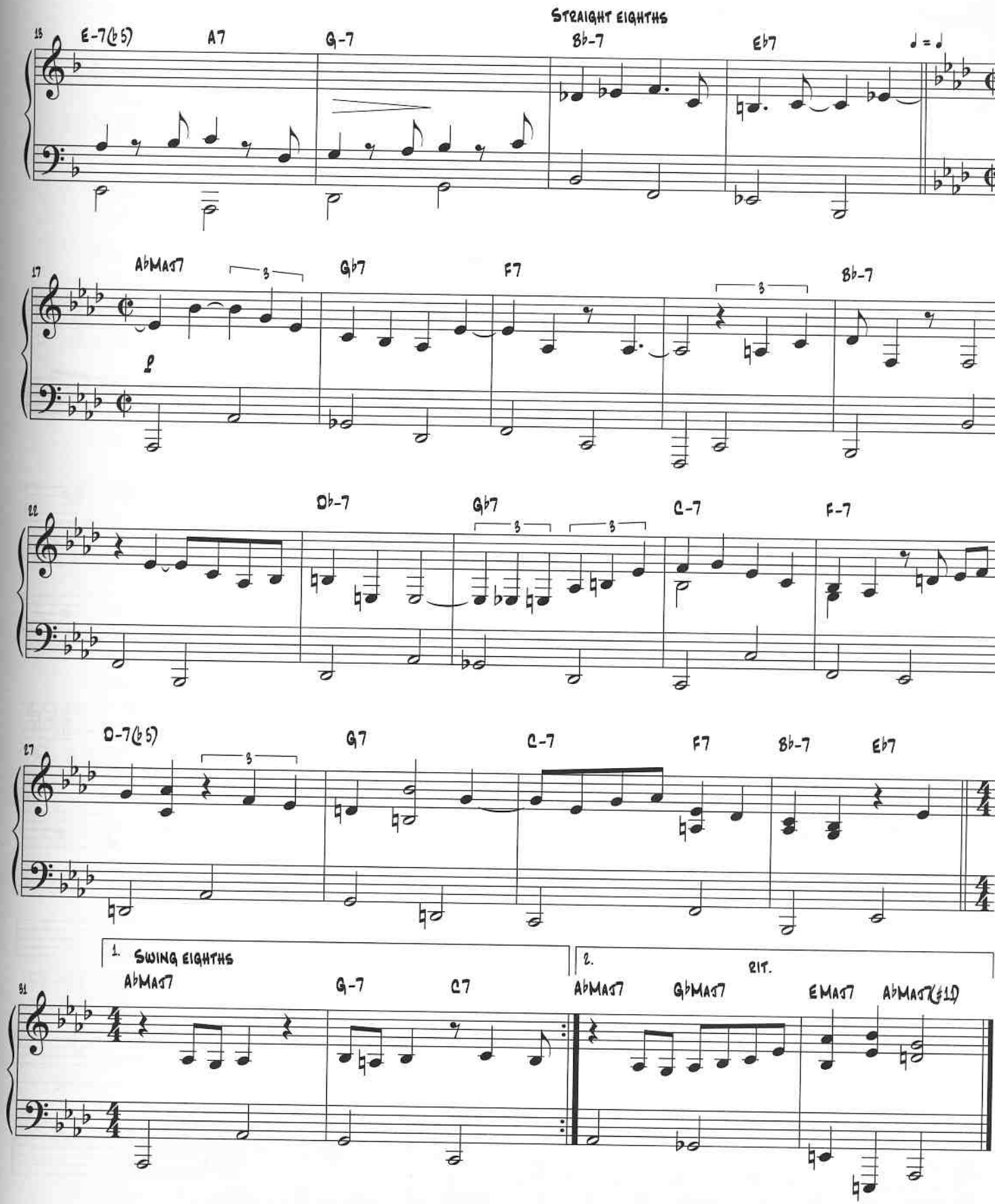

SWING FEEL
A-7
D7
GMAJ7
G-7
C7
FMAJ7
F-7
Bb7
A-7
D7
G7
C
1.
2.
MOLTO RIT.

> **Tip**
>
> When learning any tunes, practice two feels: ballads as swing tunes and swing tunes as ballads. Then practice moving from one feel to the other.

Etude. "Cabernet"

This piece, based on the chord changes to Henry Mancini's tune "The Days of Wine and Roses," is an example of an improvisation that moves between swing and ballad feels. Note that the straight eighth notes and the quarter-note triplets help to slow the groove for the ballad feel. Then note how easy it is to get back to the "four" feel by simply swinging the phrase group of the last two bars. Practice this etude until you are comfortable with these rhythmic shifts.




STRAIGHT EIGHTHS
15
E-7(♭5)
A7
G-7
B♭-7
E♭7
♩ = ♩
17
A♭MAJ7
G♭7
F7
B♭-7
22
D♭-7
G♭7
C-7
F-7
27
D-7(♭5)
G7
C-7
F7
B♭-7
E♭7
1. SWING EIGHTHS
2.
RIT.
31
A♭MAJ7
G-7
C7
A♭MAJ7
G♭MAJ7
EMAJ7
A♭MAJ7(♯11)

Lead Sheet. "Cabernet"

6

Practice "Cabernet" from the lead sheet, using it to create your own bass line and comping part. Note the tonal modulation in the middle of the tune. In the 1979 recording session of Bill Evans' CD *Affinity*, Toots Thielemans introduced an arrangement of "The Days of Wine and Roses" that included this modulation.