JAZZ VIBRAPHONE AS A CHORDAL INSTRUMENT: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO COMPING AND BLOCK CHORD TECHNIQUES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Although there are many jazz vibraphone method books available on the market, I have found that they do not cover the full spectrum of concepts that are necessary to play the vibraphone as a chordal or comping instrument within a group setting. Specifically, I found that there is no methodology for improvisation within this context. This dissertation explores chordal concepts that are frequently discussed in piano method books but have not been addressed in-depth in the vibraphone pedagogical materials currently available. An examination of block chord and other pianistic approaches to playing are discussed and applied to vibraphone performance. This includes analyses of solos by notable jazz pianists, including Milt Buckner, George Shearing, Oscar Peterson, Phineas Newborn, Red Garland, and McCoy Tyner. Vibraphone adaptations of these solos are included, as well as exercises and etudes to help demonstrate how these concepts can be used in a real musical context. Stefon Harris's four-mallet grip, which has not been addressed in previous publications, is also discussed in detail. While there are a handful of grips that have been accepted in the percussion community, including the Stevens grip, the Burton grip, and Traditional grip, this dissertation offers an alternative to these techniques that I have found particularly helpful in executing some of the more complex material that is included in this dissertation. This dissertation aims at providing the reader with the necessary skills to both fulfill the role of an accompanimental instrumentalist in a group setting, as well as become versed in the art of chordal improvisation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my committee chair, Professor John "Chip" Stephens, who I have had the privilege of studying with for three years during my time at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His knowledge of jazz piano concepts was indispensable, and without his guidance and help, this dissertation would not have been possible.

I also want to thank my committee members, Professor William Moersch, Professor Gabriel Solis, and Professor Larry Gray, for all of their help and insight in the dissertation-writing process. Their input was critical in the success of my dissertation.

In addition, I would like to especially thank Stefon Harris, for his permission to include a description of his innovative four-mallet grip in Chapter 2 of my dissertation. I thank my family for helping to support me while I attended Graduate school. I thank Summer for her dedication and support for the many months that I spent writing my dissertation. I also want to thank all of my instructors at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for all of their guidance, including Professor Charles "Chip" McNeill, Professor Tito Carrillo, Professor Ricardo Flores, Professor Ron Bridgewater, Professor Jim Pugh, Professor Joan Hickey, and Professor Joel Spencer. I would also like to thank everyone that has helped me along the way in achieving my goals that I have not specifically mentioned. I have had so many great teachers and friends that have helped me reach this point in my life, and I would not be where I am today without their guidance and support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The vibraphone is a relatively young instrument. It was originally invented by Herman Winterhoff of the Leedy Manufacturing Company in the 1920s and later reworked by Henry Schluter of J. C. Deagan Inc. While companies were experimenting and manufacturing a variety of new percussion instruments during this time period, many of these fell out of use and became "extinct". The vibraphone managed to survive thanks to its popularity in jazz.

The early players of the instrument, including Lionel Hampton and Red Norvo, treated it as a single line melodic instrument a majority of the time, though they would also use it as a chordal accompanying instrument on occasion. Influenced by his bebop peers Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, Milt Jackson had an approach that was strictly melodic-driven, like that of a horn player. Despite the fact that Jackson had a background playing both guitar and piano before switching to vibraphone, to my knowledge, he did not utilize a four-mallet technique in his professional career, committing to a two-mallet approach on the instrument. Many other vibraphonists took this two-mallet approach as well, but as time progressed, vibraphonists began to fulfill the role of a chordal instrument within the context of a rhythm section more often. Gary Burton gained popularity in the 1960s with his pianistic four-mallet approach to the instrument. He began playing in groups as the sole chordal instrument, which had not been done extensively previously. In 1964, Stan Getz hired a young Gary Burton to play in his group as the only chordal instrument. Bobby Hutcherson also began to experiment with providing chordal accompaniment, or comping, in group settings around this time. Most notable is his work with Jackie McLean, as well as with Eric Dolphy.

Although there is a history of the vibraphone being used solely to fill the role of a melodic instrument within a jazz setting by many players, with the advancements that have been made in the capabilities of the instrument, there is now an expectation that jazz vibraphonists be able to fill the role

of a chordal instrument within a jazz group. With limited examples of usage of vibraphone in this context on recordings however, especially prior to the 1960s, I believe that studying recordings of other chordal instruments, such as piano to be necessary and beneficial.

While vibraphonists have been using piano as a source of inspiration for quite a while, the pedagogical material on the subject of comping and chordal playing on the vibraphone is not very extensive. Although there are resources available, I have found that they only provide basic information on the subject. In the succeeding chapters of this book, I aim to fill the gap that current pedagogical materials don't include regarding chordal vibraphone practices. My goal is to provide intermediate students with an introduction to chordal playing, as well as more in-depth chordal concepts for advanced students.

My dissertation also contains a guide to using the Harris Grip. Stefon Harris, arguably the most important and influential jazz vibraphonist of today, has a unique four-mallet technique that until now has not been written about.

The materials in this book includes not only a methodological approach to comping within the context of a jazz group, but also the "block chord" approach to playing. This is an approach that is common practice on other chordal instruments, most notably used by pianists, but has not been written about or utilized by many vibraphone players. With this dissertation, I want to offer the percussion community with information on how the "block chord" approach can be utilized in jazz vibraphone applications. I have included transcriptions of solos by notable jazz pianists to demonstrate their own approach to "block chord" playing. I have also included vibraphone adaptations of their solos to demonstrate how the concepts that they use can be applied to vibraphone performance.

CHAPTER 2: TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2. 1 THE HARRIS GRIP

In this section, I aim to offer percussion students an alternative to the four-mallet grips that are primarily used by performers. I have personally learned the Burton, Stevens, and Traditional Grips, however I have found that Stefon Harris's approach works best for my own approach to playing.

Stefon Harris told me that he created the grip in an attempt to combine the advantages offered by both cross-stick grips, like Burton and Traditional grips, as well as independent grips, like the Stevens grip. The Harris grip allows the performer the ability to play melodic lines with power, while still holding four mallets. I have also found that it is possible to play wider intervals with the grip than with Burton or Traditional Grips.

While the Harris grip is not an independent grip like the Stevens grips, where the two mallet shafts held in each hand do not touch, it is also not quite like other cross-stick grips either, like Burton or Traditional. The mallet shafts do cross, but only right at their ends. This maintains the stability typically found in cross-stick grips, while offering more independence.

2.1.1 HOLDING THE MALLETS

To begin, place the shaft of one mallet between your index and middle fingers. Next, curl your pinky, ring, and middle fingers around the shaft. I like to leave about half an inch of space at the end of the shaft. Your pinky finger should be gripping the end of the mallet shaft firmly. Your ring and middle fingers can be loosely wrapped for now. This mallet will function as your outside mallet (see figs. 1 and 2).

Figs. 1 and 2: Placement of the outside mallet.

With a second mallet, rest the end of the shaft at the base of your pinky, and wrap your ring and index fingers around the shaft. Then grip the shaft with your index finger and thumb (see fig. 3). When looking at the palm of your hand, this second mallet should be resting on top of the first mallet and will function as your inside mallet. The first, or outside mallet, should be resting between your hand and the second, or inside mallet (see fig. 4).

Fig. 3: Placement of the inside mallet.

Fig. 4: Placement of both inside and outside mallets.

2.1.2 PLAYING DIFFERENT INTERVALS

To extend the span of the grip to play wider intervals, loosen your grip on the inside mallet with your thumb, index, and middle fingers, then push the shaft of the inside mallet away from the outside mallet to create a larger gap between the mallet heads. Your thumb will be resting above the shaft of the inside mallet. For wider intervals, push both mallet shafts away from one another with your thumb and index fingers. To play closer intervals, loosen your grip on the inside mallet with your index finger, and push the shaft of the inside mallet inward with your thumb. When the mallet heads are at their closest, your index finger should be straight, with your fingertip resting on top of the inside mallet shaft (see figs. 5 and 6).

Figs. 5 and 6: Playing wider and shorter intervals.

As you try to play different intervals, use figures 7-16 for reference. Pay attention to the changes in index finger and thumb placement used to achieve each of the intervals. For close intervals, the index finger will be fully extended, with your fingertip resting on top of the inside mallet shaft, and the thumb pushing against the side of the mallet shaft. Typically, your index finger and thumb will be

pinching opposite sides of the mallet shaft for fourth intervals. To play wide intervals, the outside of your index finger will be pushing the outside mallet, while the outside of your thumb is pushing the inside mallet (see figs. 7-16).

Figs. 7-12: Playing 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th intervals.

Figs. 13-16: Playing octaves and wider intervals.

2.1.3 PLAYING MELODIC LINES WHILE USING THE HARRIS GRIP

To play melodic lines while using the Harris grip, there are a few techniques to consider. On the following pages, I outline these options. Each option has its own advantages, and I recommend experimenting with them to find the approach that works best for you. In the descriptions below, note that “1” refers to the outer left mallet, “2” to the inner left mallet, “3” to the inner right mallet, and “4” to the outer right mallet.

The first option that I would like to discuss is to use mallets two and three to play melodic lines. Typically, when playing with both mallets in one hand with this grip, your wrists will be turned slightly outward. When playing melodic lines with mallets two and three however, you can turn your wrists inward. In this approach, your palms will be facing downward. While mallets two and three will be closer to the bars, mallets one and four will be farther away. This allows you to use full wrist strokes similar to how you would play when holding two mallets. I particularly like this approach, because it facilitates playing louder while holding four mallets.

Another option when playing melodic lines while holding four mallets, is to “choke up” on mallets one and four (see fig. 17). This moves mallet weight closer to your hands, and it can help make playing faster material easier. I do not use this approach regularly, but it can be helpful when you need to play fast lines at a louder volume.

Lastly, an approach that I do use frequently, is very similar to Gary Burton's approach to playing melodic lines while holding four mallets. Rather than playing with mallets two and three, with this approach, you play with mallets two and four. For this technique, in your right hand, you want to push mallet three close to your body and “lock” it in place perpendicular to the bars (see fig. 18). This gets the mallet out of the way, allowing you to use mallet four to play melodic lines. This approach is particularly useful when playing a combination of melodic lines and four-note chord voicings. This is

because mallet four is set up to play the top line of a chord, requiring less movement than if you were playing with mallet three.

Figs. 17 and 18: Techniques for playing melodic lines while holding four mallets.

2.2 SOUND PRODUCTION ON THE BARS

When playing the vibraphone, there are two striking places where you can get a good sound out of the instrument: the center of the bar and on the end of the bar (see figs. 19 and 20). Striking in the center of the bars produces the best sound, but there are instances where playing on the inner edges of the bars is necessary. When striking the end of a bar, it is important to strike the bar as close to the edge as possible in order to get the most tone out of the bar. When playing in a two-mallet context, I nearly always strike the center of the bars, in order to get the fullest sound that I can. With four-mallet playing however, there are times when striking the center of the bars is impossible or impractical. With certain chord voicings, playing on the ends of bars can be necessary.

Fig. 19: Drop 2 voicing of Ebmin9 in bar centers.

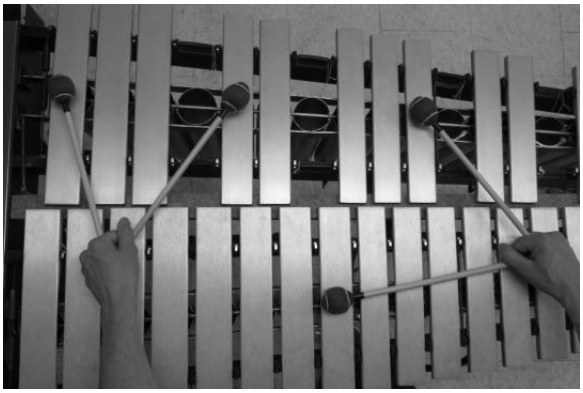
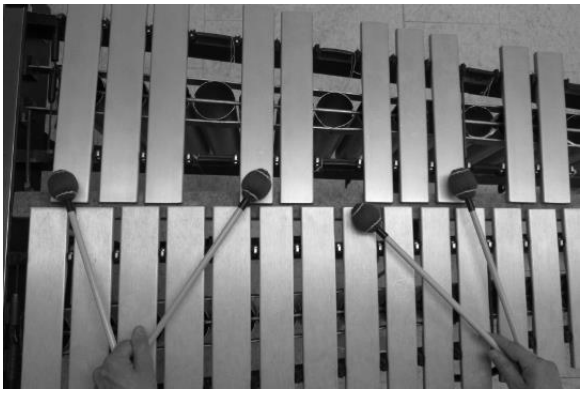


Fig. 20: Drop 2 voicing of Ebmin9 on bar ends.

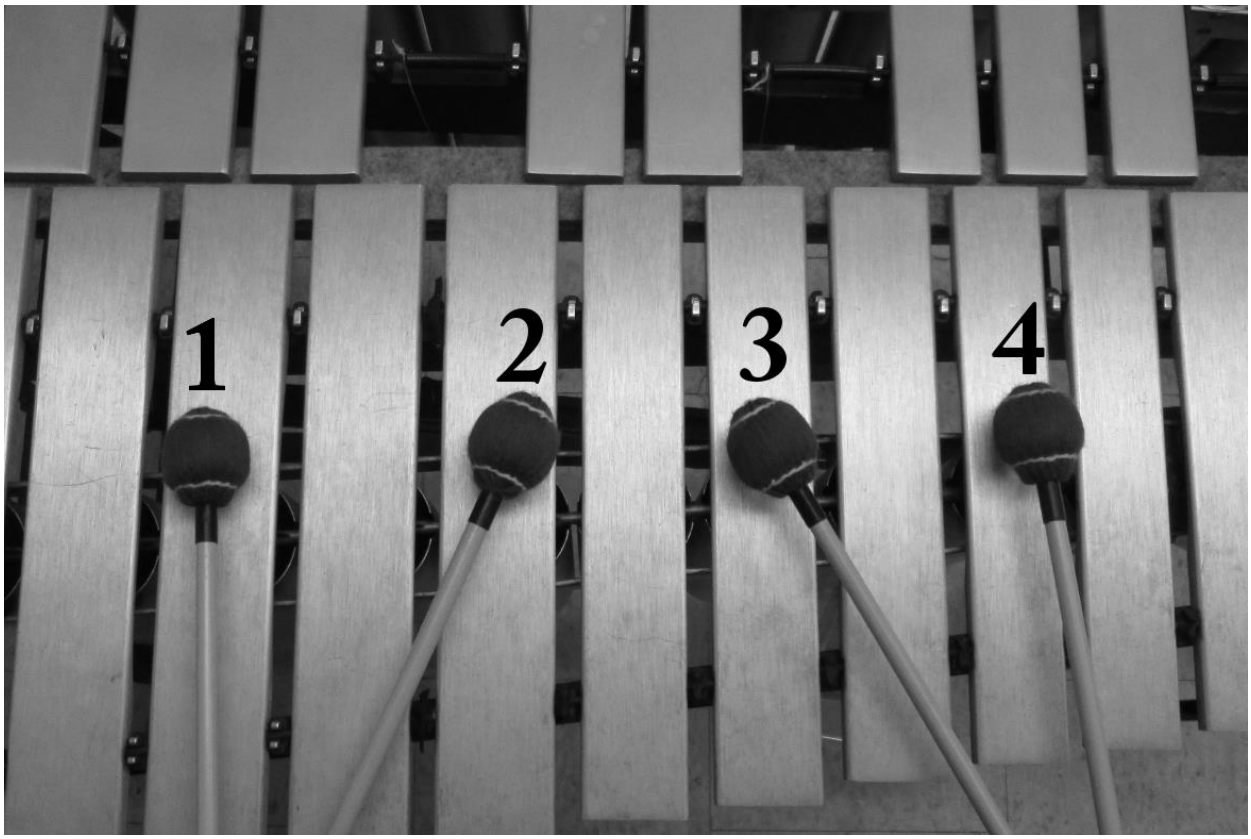


2.3 STICKING CHOICES

2.3.1 1-2-3-4 STICKINGS

When playing chords on the vibraphone, there are a variety of sticking options that can be used. In this section, when mentioning sticking choices, “1” will refer to the outer left mallet, “2” to the inner left mallet, “3” to the inner right mallet, and “4” to the outer right mallet (see fig. 21). When playing four-note chord voicings, using a 1-2-3-4 mallet sticking is the most practical, where the lowest note is played with mallet “1”, the second lowest note is played with mallet “2”, and so on. When utilizing a “block chord” approach, where several chord voicings are played in succession, the 1-2-3-4 sticking will usually be the best choice, as it allows you to play successive chords with the least amount of movement.

Fig. 21: Numbering system for mallets: 1 refers to the outer left mallet, 2 to the inner left mallet, 3 to the inner right mallet, and 4 to the outer right mallet.



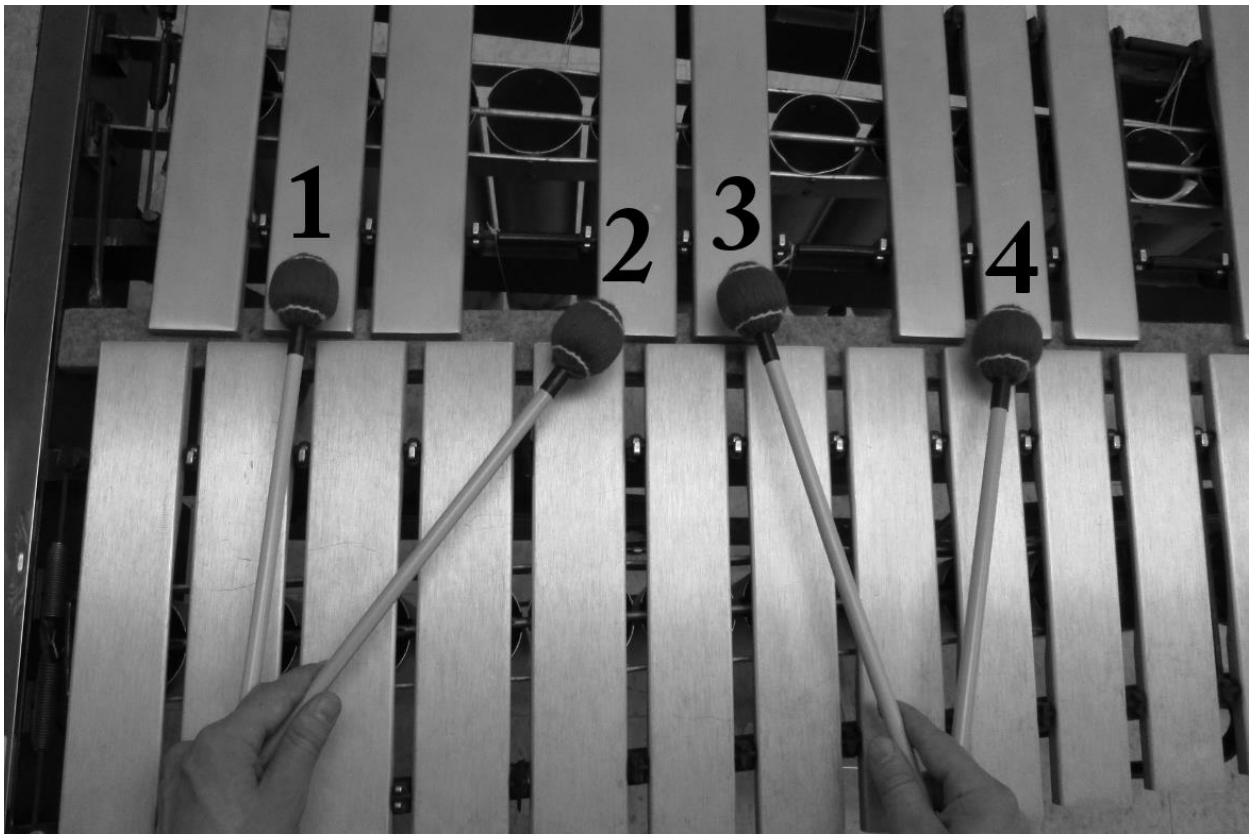
2.3.2 1-3-2-4 STICKINGS

With certain chord shapes, crossing your inner two mallets, and utilizing a 1-3-2-4 sticking, is another option to consider (see fig. 22). The advantage of this sticking is that it allows you to play in the center of the bars in instances where a 1-2-3-4 sticking would force you to strike some or all of the bars on their ends. This is a good option for chord voicings where the pitches alternate between accidentals and naturals. While this will produce a better sound overall, it will also cause you to move your mallets a larger distance when switching between chord voicings.

Fig. 22: In this example, a closed position rootless voicing of Fmin9 is played using a 1-3-2-4 sticking, allowing the player to strike each bar in its center.

In situations where you will be playing successive chords, striking on the ends of all or most bars will make the passage easier to execute (see fig. 23). This choice will always mean that you are moving your mallets the least.

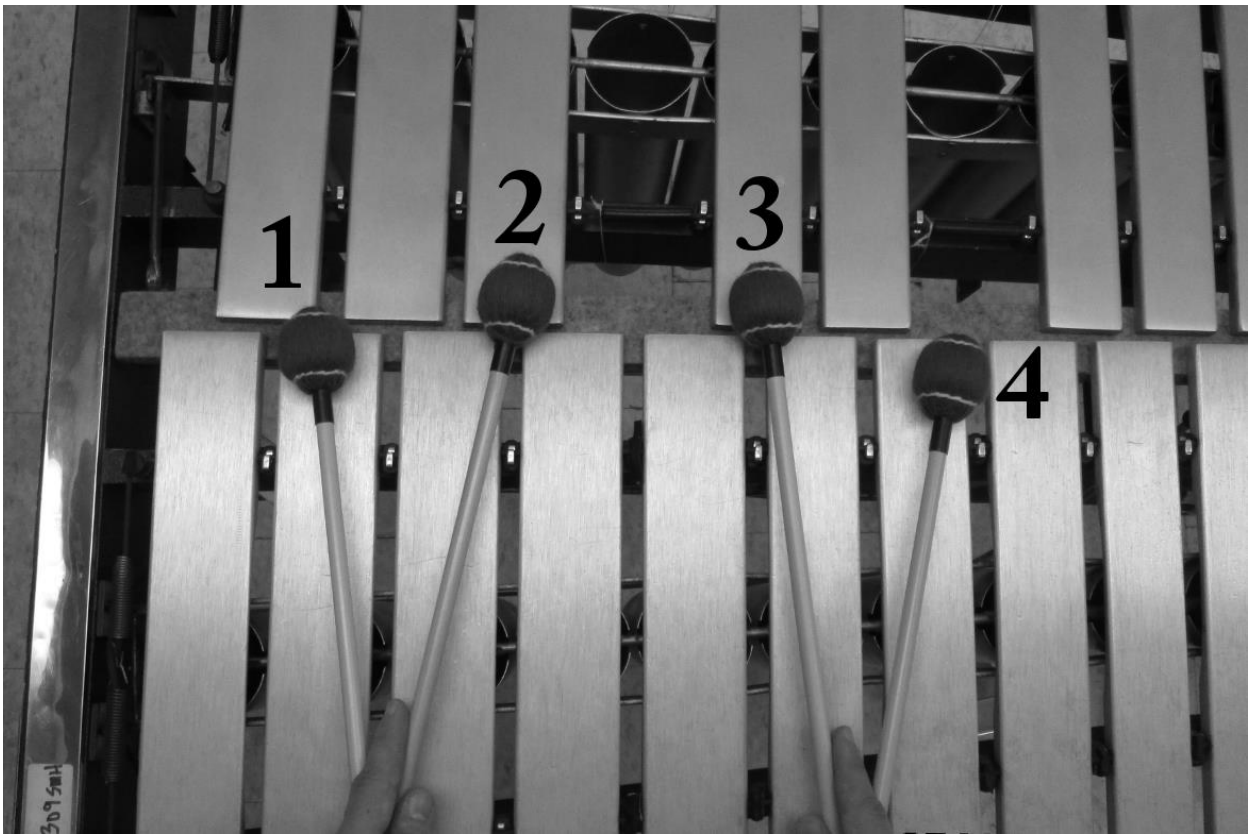
Fig. 23: Alternatively, the same Fmin9 voicing can be played on the bar ends when speed is a concern, making movement between chords easier.



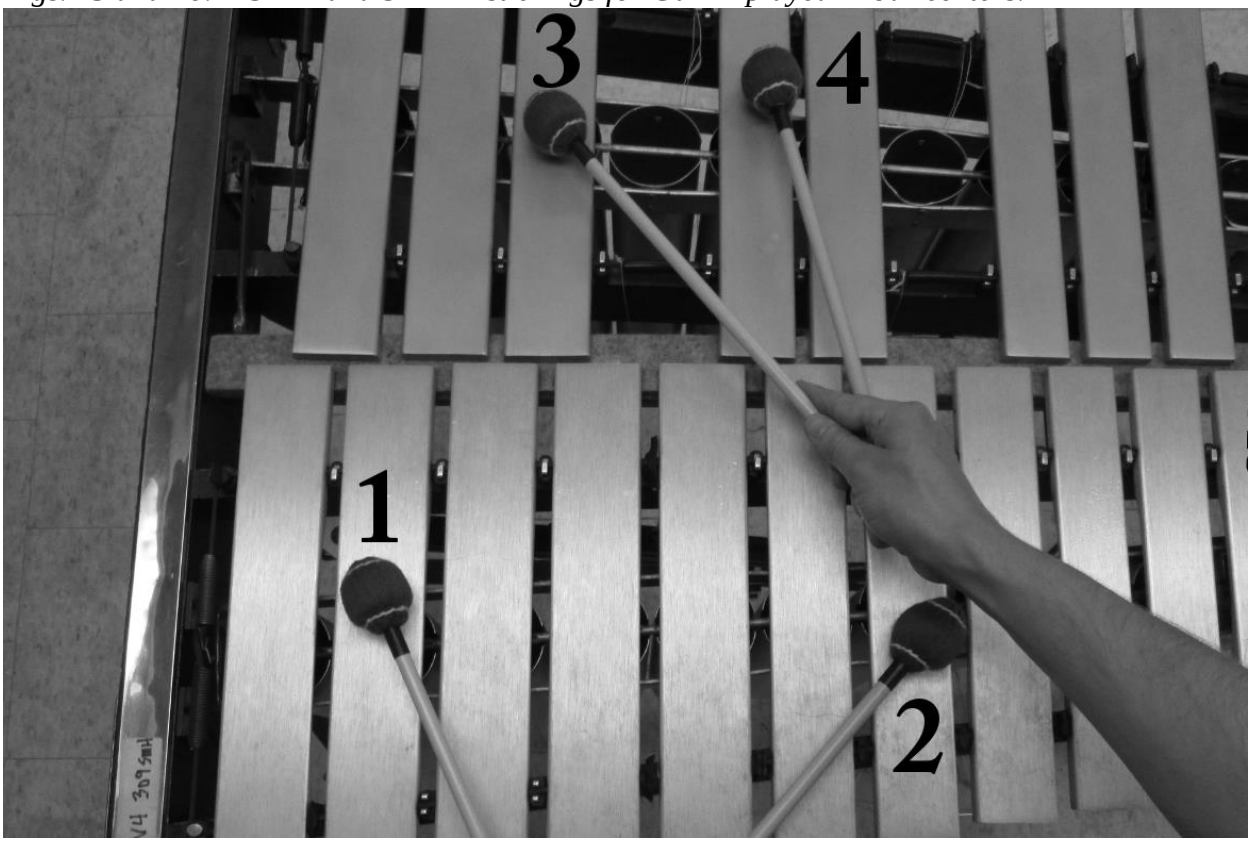
2.3.3 1-3-4-2 AND 3-1-2-4 STICKINGS

The remaining sticking permutations that we can use are 1-3-4-2 and 3-1-2-4 stickings. These options are specifically helpful when dealing with chord voicings where the center two voices are naturals and the outer voices are accidentals, or if the center two voices are accidentals and the outer voices are naturals. These stickings allow you to strike the bar centers in situations where a 1-2-3-4 sticking would need to be played on the bar ends, though they can be awkward to execute (see figs. 24-26).

Fig. 24: 1-2-3-4 sticking voicing for Gdim7 voicing, played on bar ends.



Figs. 25 and 26: 1-3-4-2 and 3-1-2-4 stickings for Gdim7 played in bar centers.



2.4 STICKING CHOICES WITH PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Each of the chordal exercises in this book should be practiced in two ways: by striking the center of the bars for as many notes as possible, and by striking all of the bars on their ends. This will help you develop the flexibility to adjust your striking positions for different musical situations. The number of bars that you will be able to strike in their centers will vary depending on the chord shape. Compare figs. 27 and 28 showing an Emin9 voicing first with all notes played in the center of the bars, and then with all notes played on the ends of the bars.

Fig. 27: Closed position rootless voicing, 1-2-3-4 voicing of Emin9 with all bars played in their center.

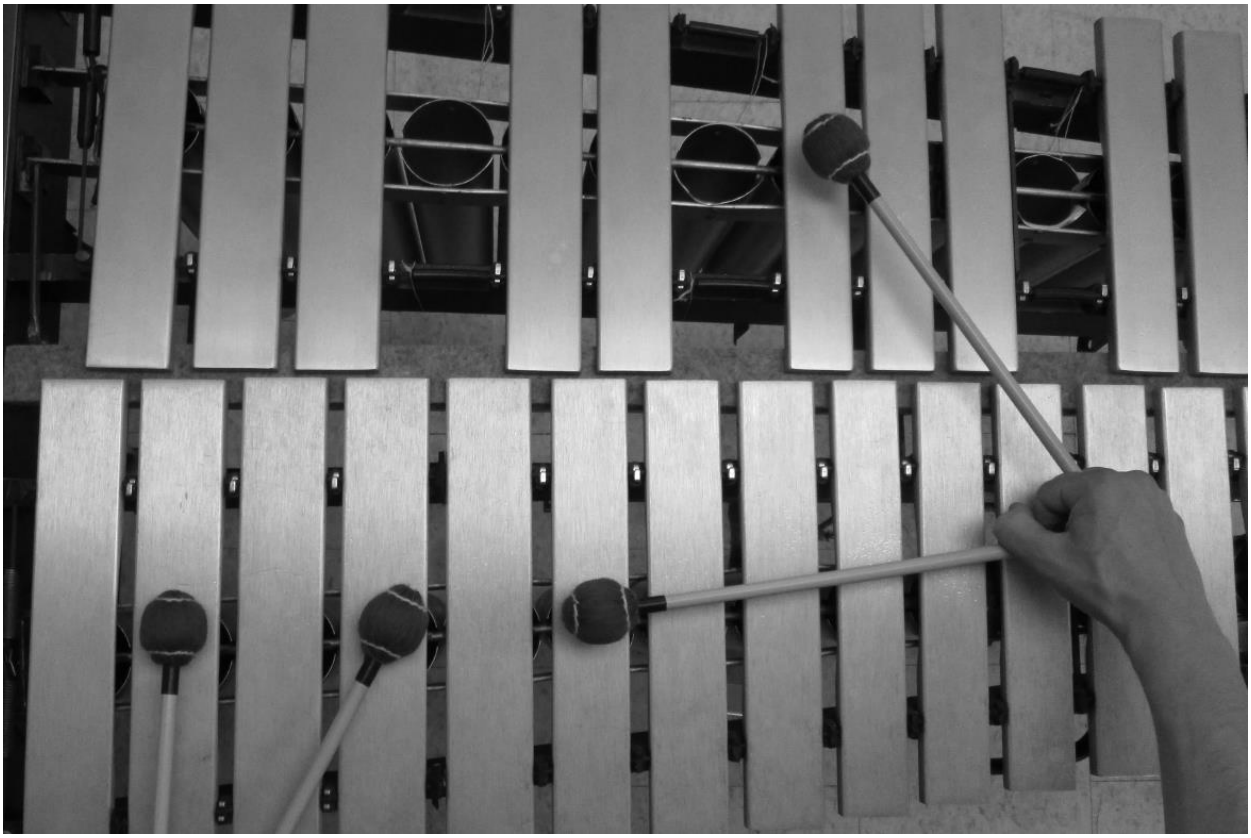
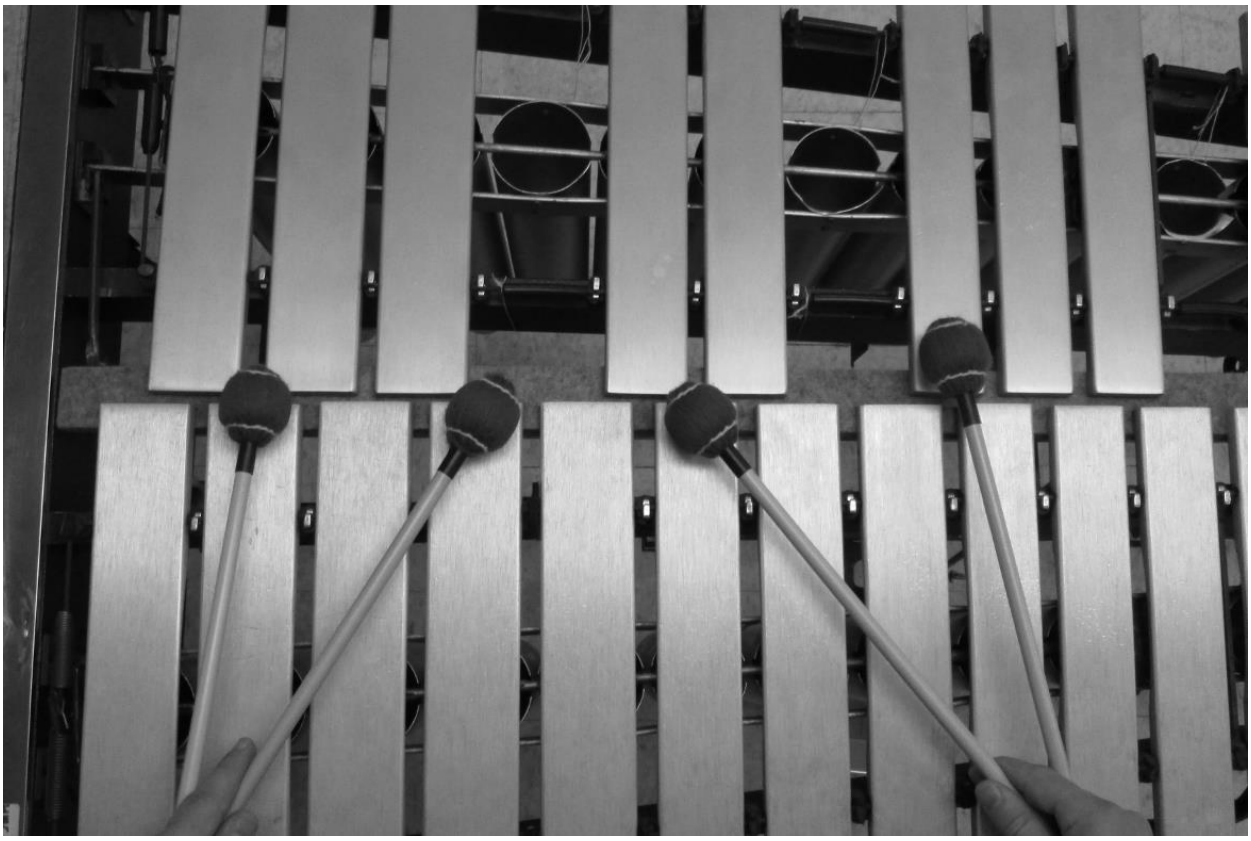
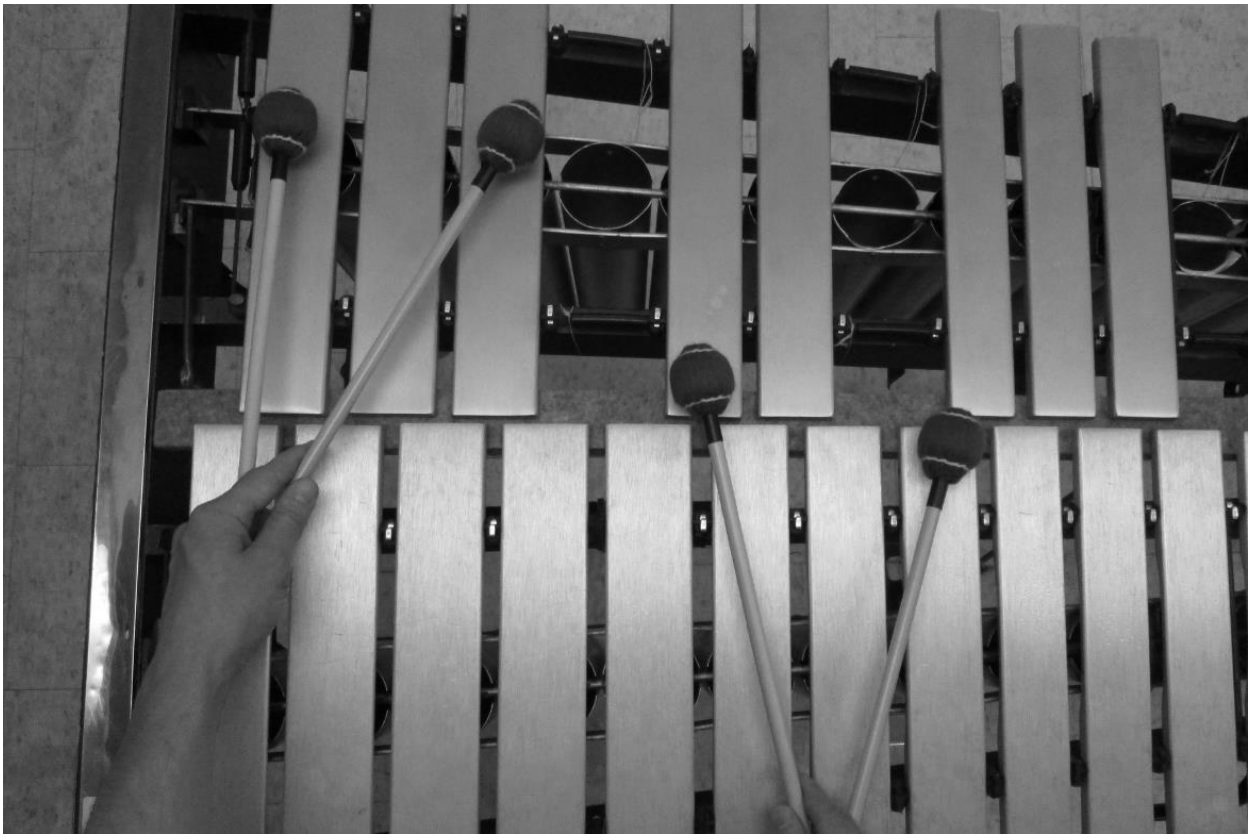


Fig. 28: Closed position rootless voicing of Emin9 played with all bars on their ends.



Because of the shape of certain chord voicings and the striking positions of each bar relative to others, it can sometimes be impossible to play all of the bars in the center. Notice the shape of the chord voicing in fig. 29, in which the Db and F notes played with the right hand can only be struck on the ends of the bars. The Gb and Bb notes played with the left hand, however, can be struck either in their centers or on their ends without any difficulty.

Fig. 29: Closed position rootless voicing of Ebmin9. Due to the shape of the chord, the Db and F bars played in the right hand can only be struck on the ends.



While striking the bar centers will produce a better sound, playing on the bar ends will allow you to play faster due to the closer proximity of bar ends to one another. I recommend using these two techniques interchangeably in your own playing, depending on how fast you need to play, as well as what you find most comfortable. If I am able to strike the bars in the center, I generally will. When playing a fast-moving chordal idea, however, I will opt for striking most or all of the bars on their ends in order to reduce the movement necessary between chords.

CHAPTER 3: CHORDAL VOICINGS AND CONCEPTS

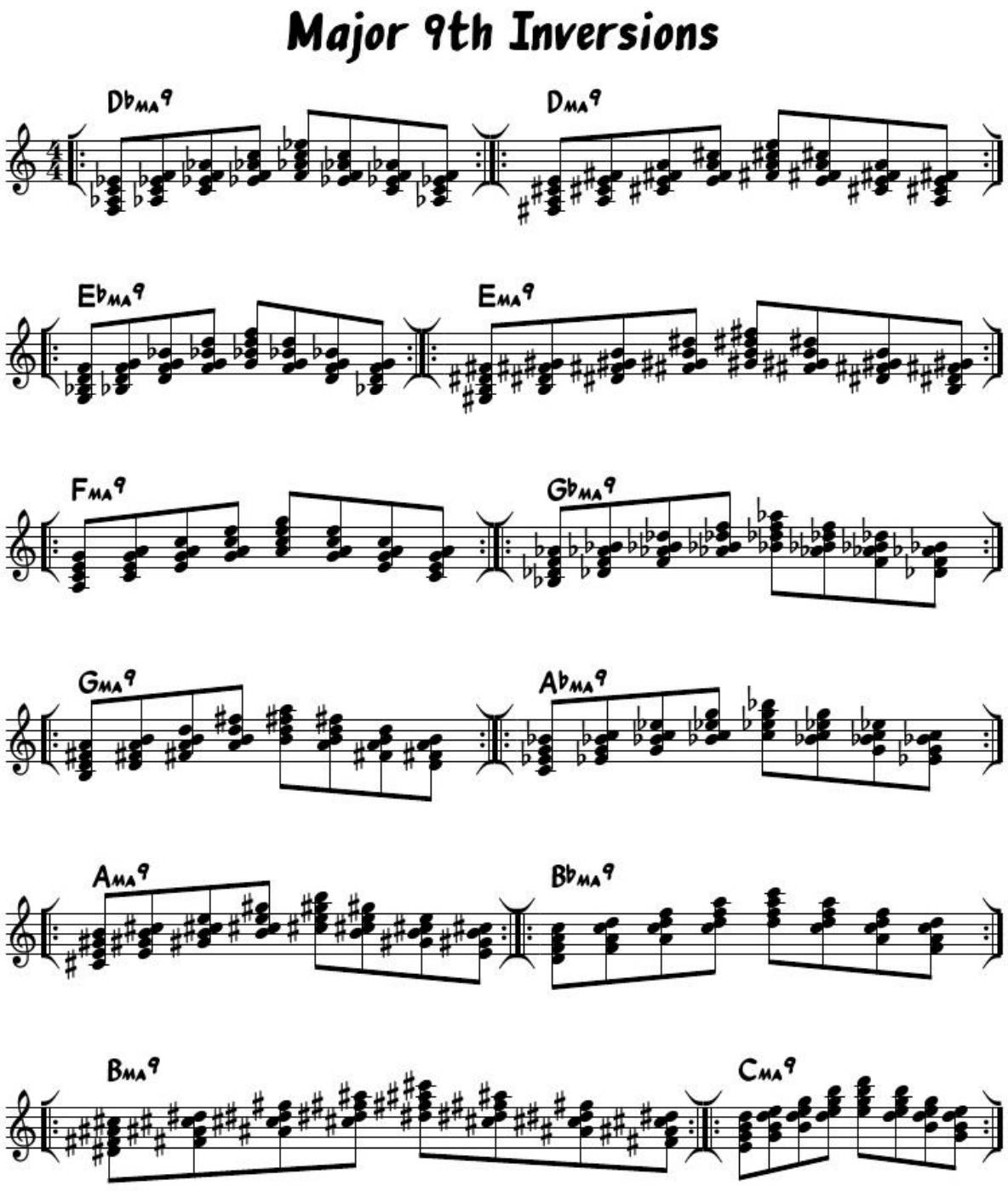
3.1 CLOSED POSITION VOICINGS AND INVERSIONS

Closed position voicings are chordal voicings where the notes of the chord are played as close as possible. Typically, this type of voicing would be within the range of a single octave. Closed position voicings are a good starting point for the exercises covered in this book, as becoming familiar and comfortable with them will be a good primer for the topics discussed in the subsequent chapters of this book. This chapter examines inversions of closed position voicings and includes exercises that cover the entire range of the vibraphone.

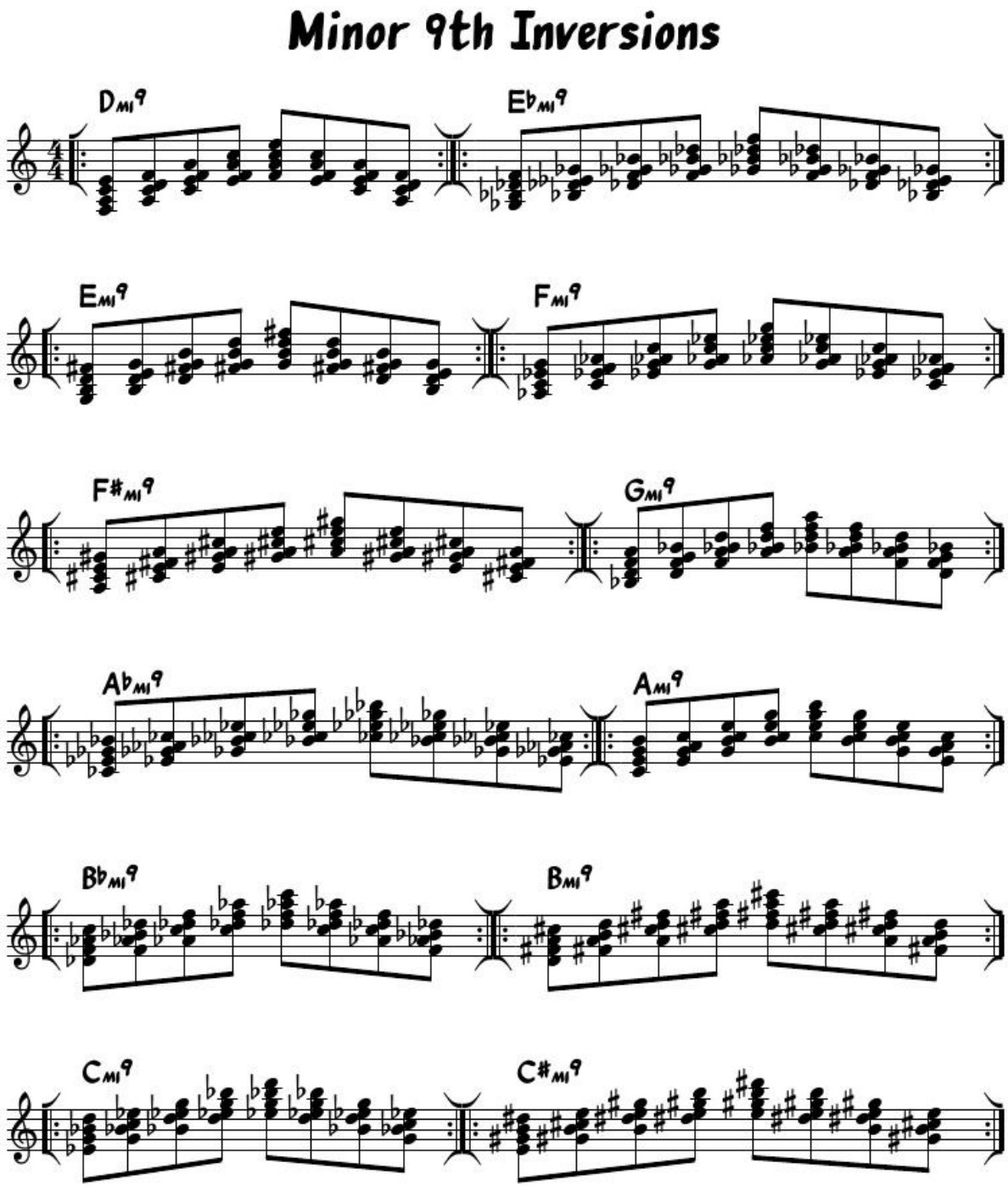
The following exercises go through the inversions of major, minor, dominant, and half-diminished chords, and should be practiced slow first. I recommend using a metronome and starting at ♩=30 bpm. Practice them using both mallet placement options that we have discussed: aiming for the bar centers wherever possible, as well as playing all of the bars on their ends. Gradually work up your tempo, increasing your metronome by a few beats per minute (bpm) at a time. Our goal is to work towards and increase our fastest comfortable tempo. Note that with chords that have no accidentals, such as Cmaj9 and Dmin9, striking all of the bars in their centers rather than on their ends does not require extra movement.

In the exercises on the subsequent pages, 9th chord inversions are shown ascending and descending an octave, starting with the 3rd voice of the chord as the lowest pitch. The exercises begin in the low register of the instrument and ascend chromatically to cover all twelve chords. Note that dominant 9th and half-diminished 7th chords are included in the same exercise. This is because the voicings accommodate both chords.

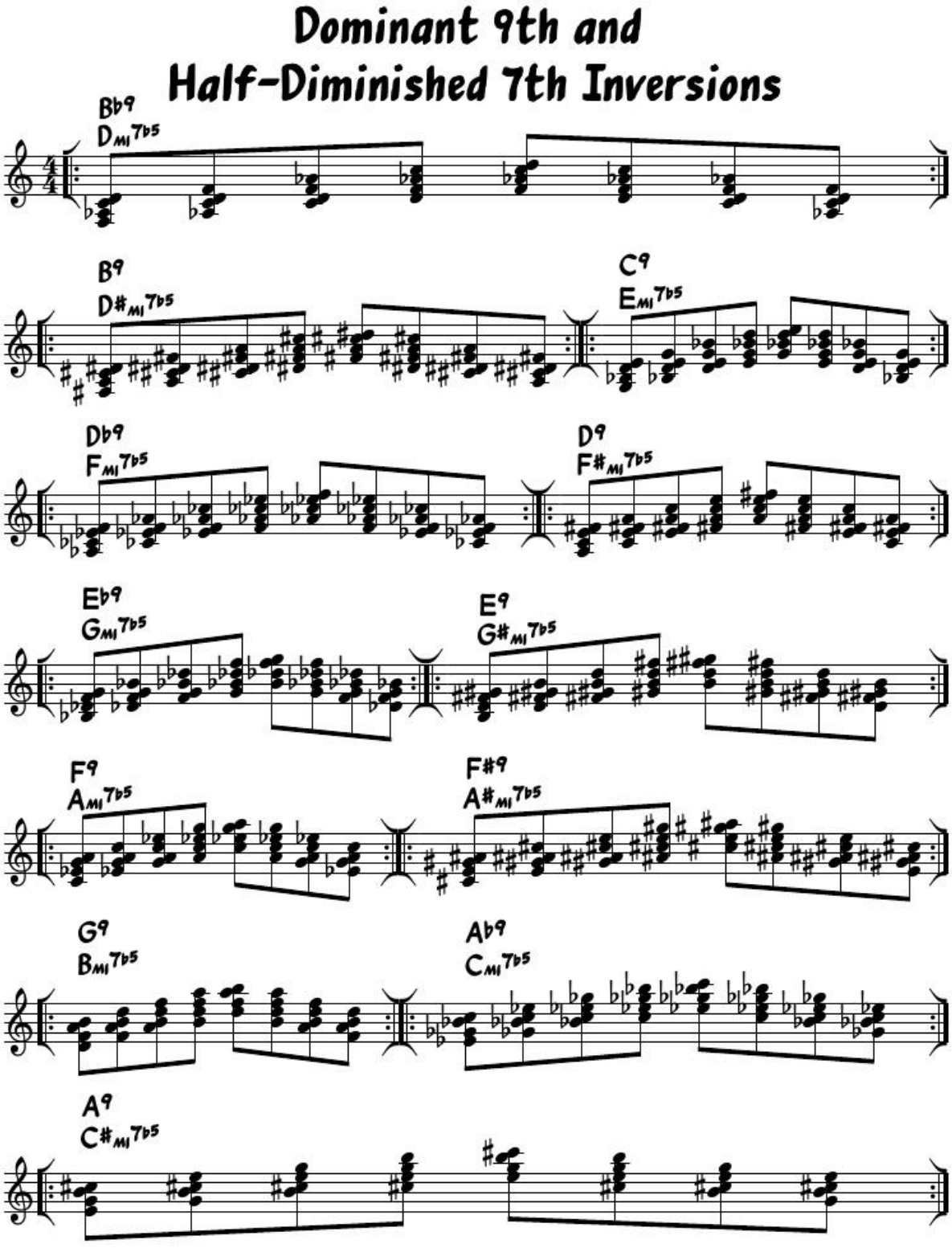
Exercise 1: Major 9th chord inversions.



Exercise 2: Minor 9th chord inversions.



Exercise 3: Dominant 9th and half-diminished 7th chord inversions.

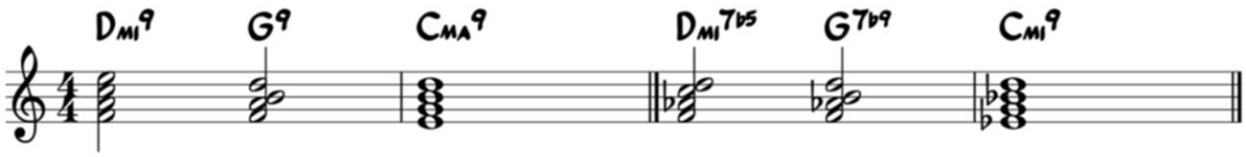


3.2 CLOSED POSITION ii-V-I PROGRESSIONS

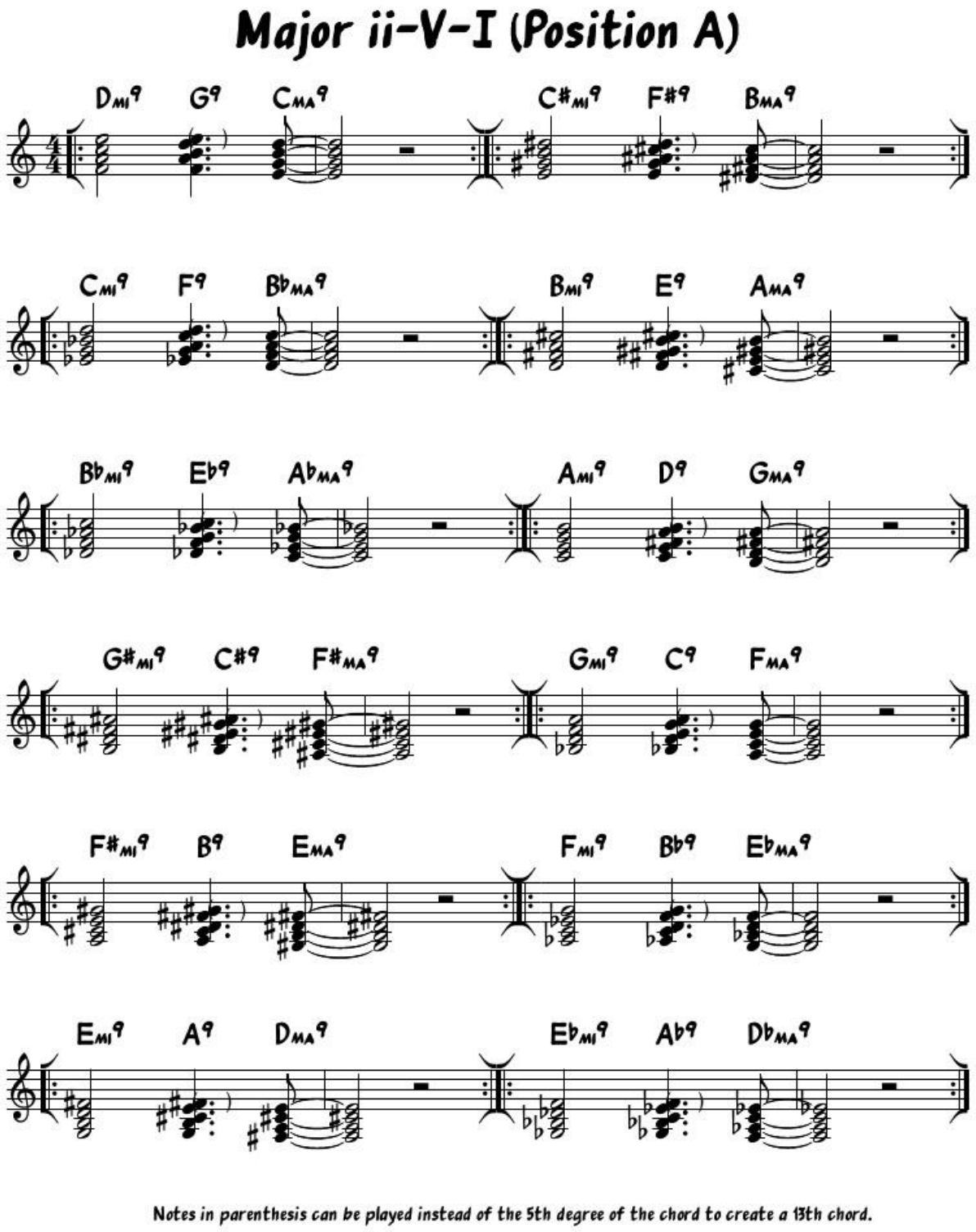
It is important to be comfortable playing ii-V-I progressions, as they are one of the most commonly used harmonic patterns in jazz. This chapter covers closed position voicings of both the major ii-V-I and minor iiø-V-i progressions. Two inversions are covered, one with the 3rd degree of the ii chord in the low voice (position A), and another with the 7th degree of the ii chord in the low voice (position B). Note the voice leading present between the 3rd and 7th degrees of each of the chords as you work through these exercises. The 3rd and 7th degrees act as leading tones and either resolve downward to or become the leading tone for the next chord.

To illustrate this, look at fig. 30 below. The 3rd degree of the Dmin9 chord (F) becomes the 7th of the G9 chord, which then resolves down to the 3rd degree of the Cmaj9 chord (E). The 7th degree of the Dmin9 chord (C) resolves down to the 3rd degree of the G9 chord (B), which becomes the 7th degree of the Cmaj9 chord. Similarly, the 3rd degree of the Dmin7(b5) chord (F) becomes the 7th of the G7(b9) chord, which then resolves down to the 3rd degree of the Cmin9 chord (Eb). The 7th degree of the Dmin7(b5) chord (C) resolves down to the 3rd degree of the G7(b9) chord (B), which then resolves down to the 7th degree of the Cmin9 chord (Bb). In the exercises of this chapter, practice with a metronome starting at ♩=30 bpm, and gradually increase your metronome speed by a few beats per minute (bpm) at a time. Work towards and build upon your fastest comfortable tempo. Note that for dominant 7th chords, the 13th is interchangeable with the 5th. Additionally, for major 9th chords, the 5th is interchangeable with the 6th. These options are notated in the exercises.

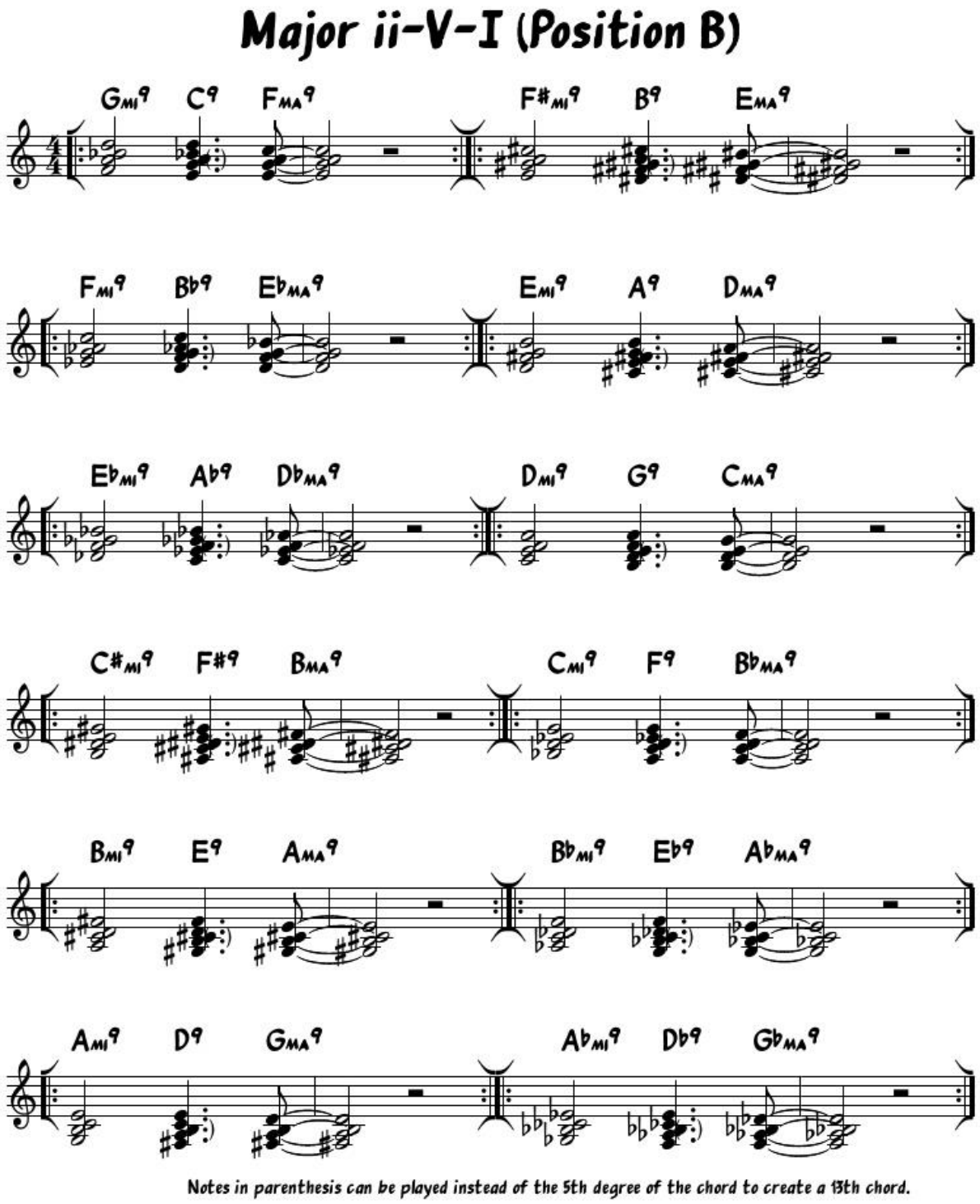
Fig. 30: Major and minor closed position ii-V-I voicings.



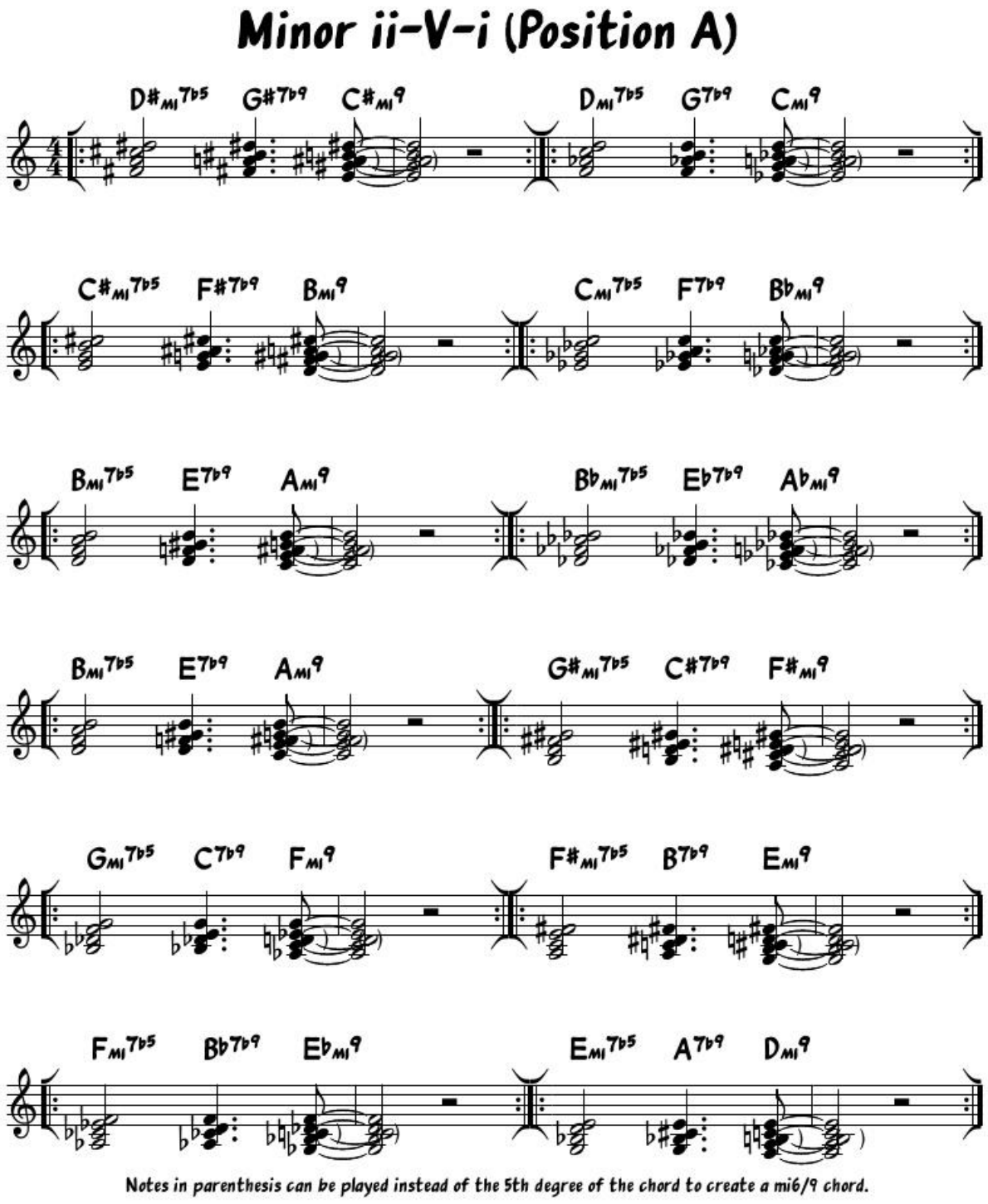
Exercise 4: Major ii-V-I chord progression voicings (position A).



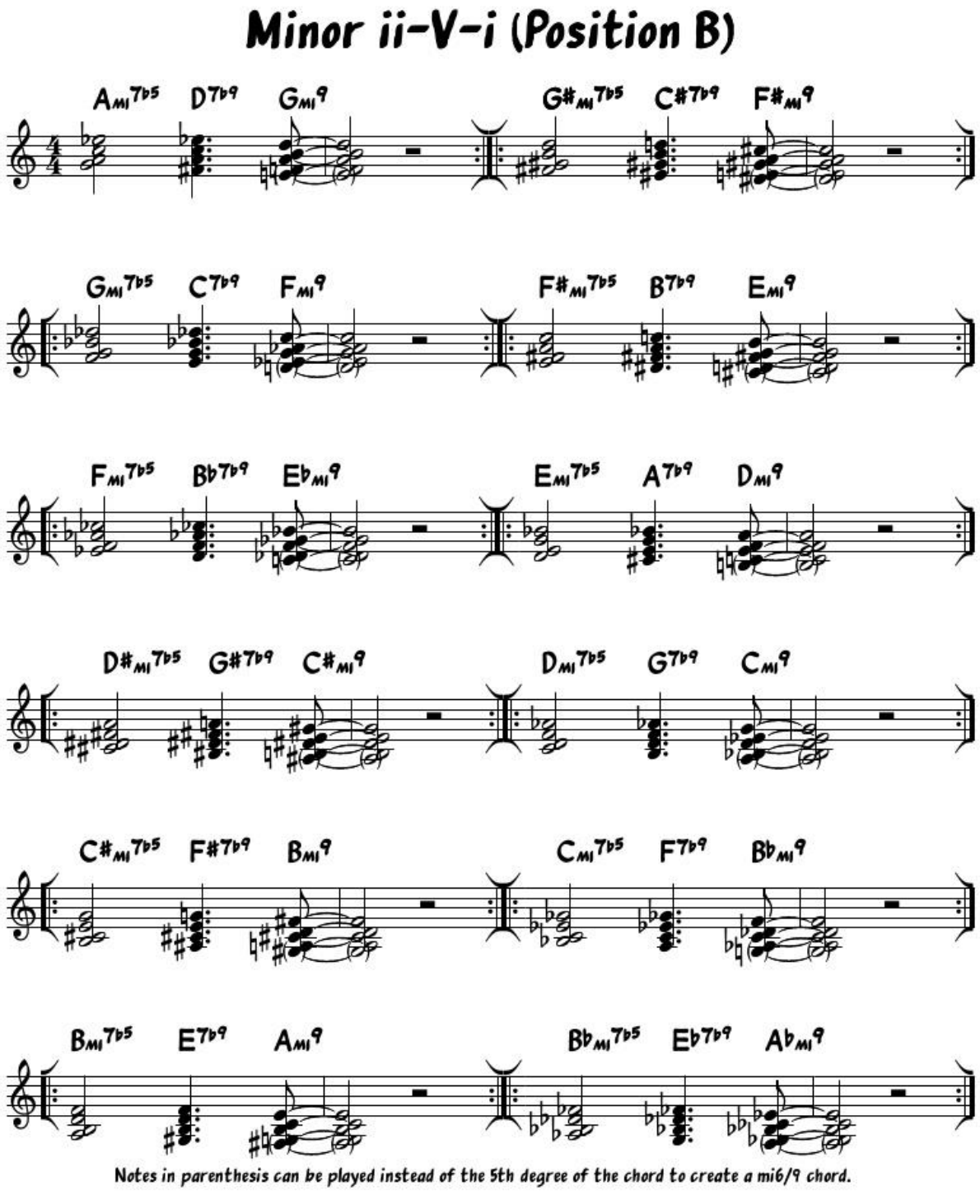
Exercise 5: Major ii-V-I chord progression voicings (position B).



Exercise 6: Minor ii-V-i chord progression voicings (position A).



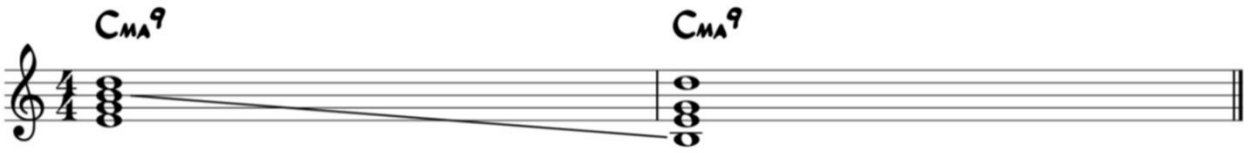
Exercise 7: Minor ii-V-i chord progression voicings (position B).



3.3 DROP 2 VOICINGS AND INVERSIONS

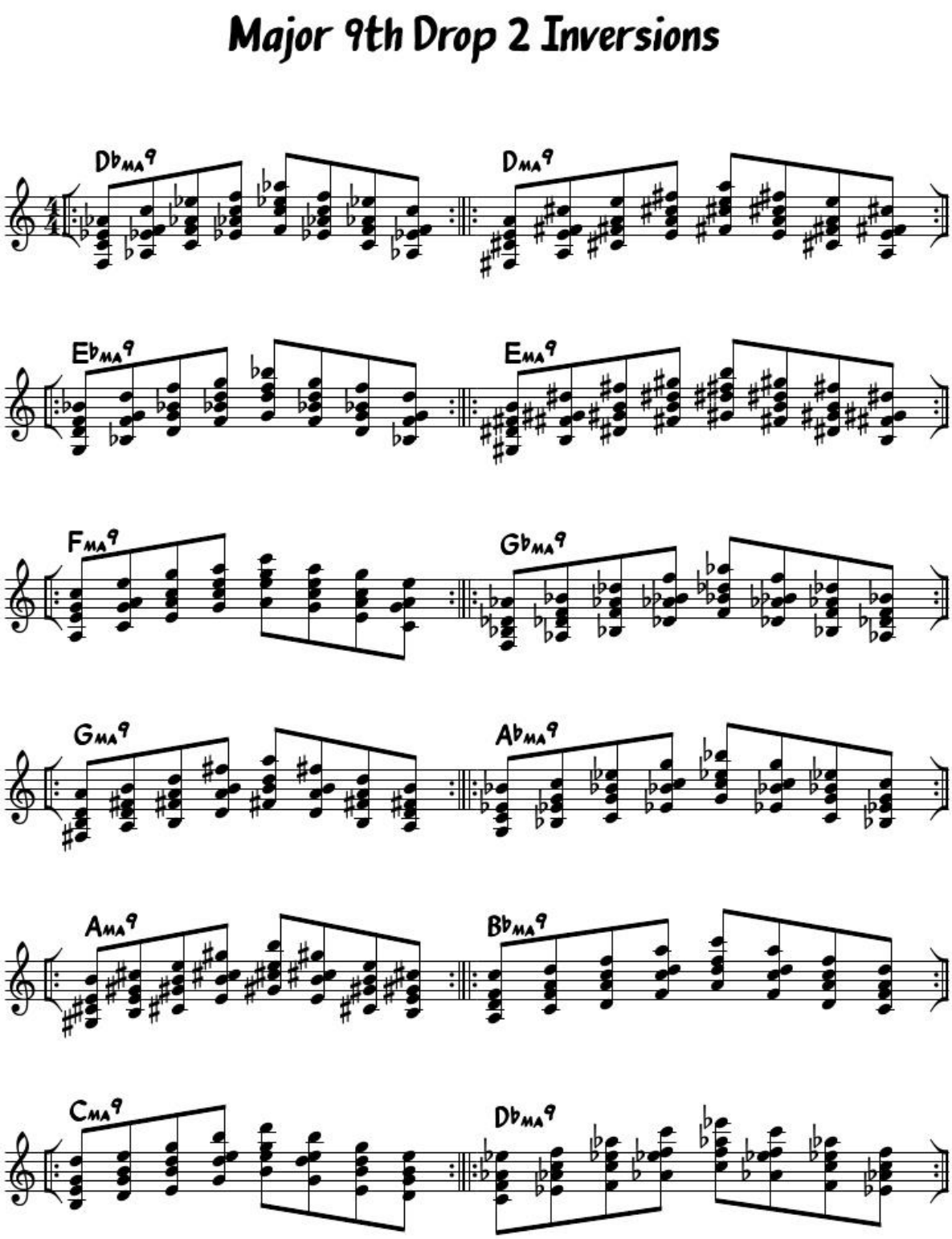
This section covers drop 2 voicings. Unlike closed position voicings, which fit within the range of an octave, drop 2 voicings surpass the octave. The larger span of these voicings provides us with a different sound to work with and gives our four-mallet playing a higher level of sophistication. An easy way to form a drop 2 voicing is by dropping the second highest note of a closed position voicing an octave lower (see fig. 31). This closed position voicing of Cmaj9 becomes a drop 2 voicing when the second highest note (B) is lowered an octave.

Fig. 31: Cmaj9 voiced in closed position (on left) and in drop 2 (on right).

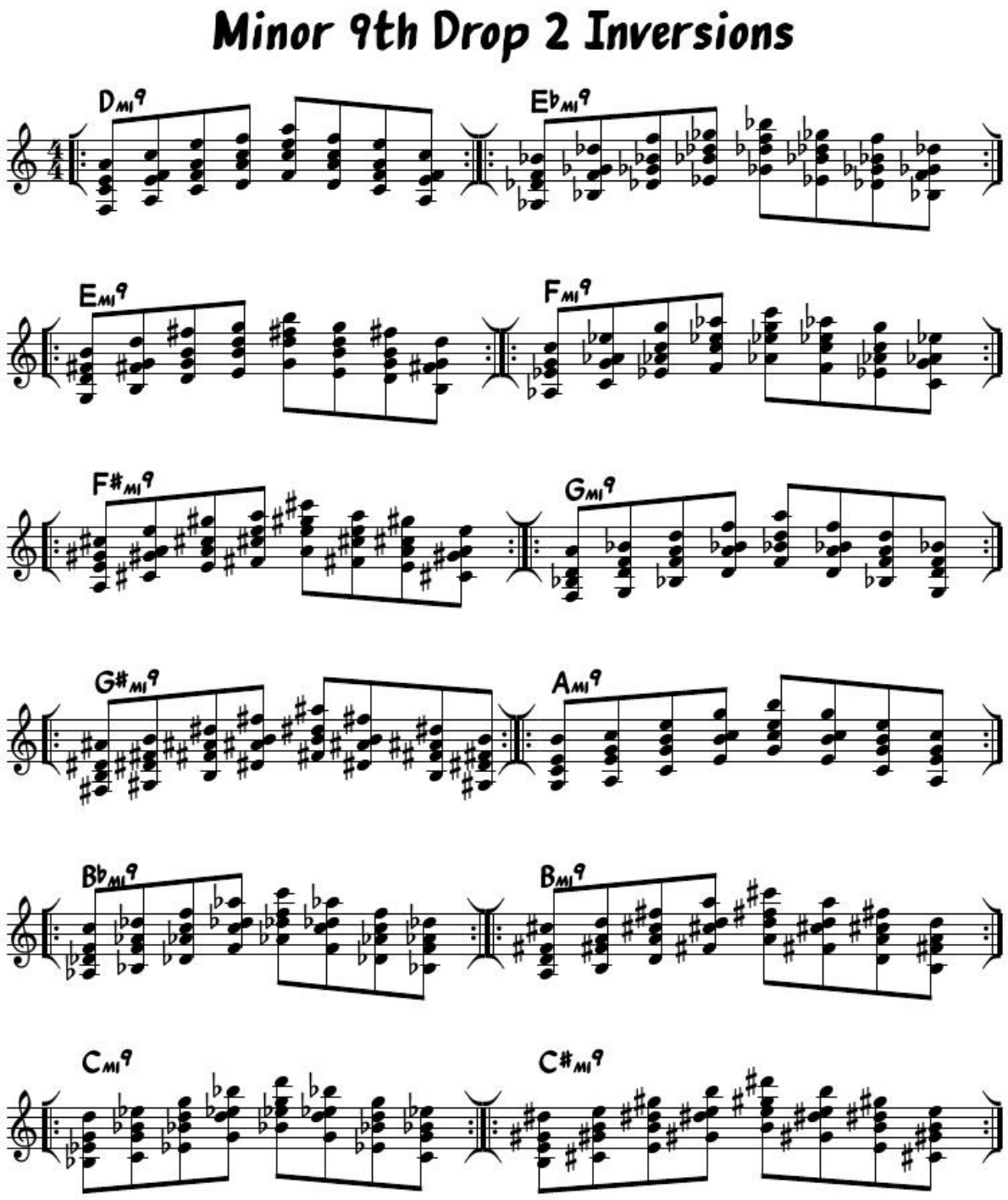


This exercises in this chapter cover drop 2 inversions of major, minor, dominant, and half-diminished chords. I recommend practicing them with a metronome starting ♩=30 bpm, and gradually increase your metronome speed. As with the exercises of previous chapters, our goal is to work towards and increase our fastest comfortable tempo. Practice them using both mallet placement options that we have discussed: striking as many bar centers as possible, as well as striking all of the bars on their ends. As in Chapter 1, chords that have no accidentals, like Cmaj9 and Dmin9, should be played in the bar centers. As you work through these exercises, note that these voicings can be applied to more than one chord when they have chord tones in common with one another. For example, voicings of Dmin9 can also be used for voicings of an Fmaj7 as well as a G13sus. Some of the following voicings illustrate this. Note that the voicings on the third page are for both dominant 9th and half-diminished chords, as they can be used interchangeably.

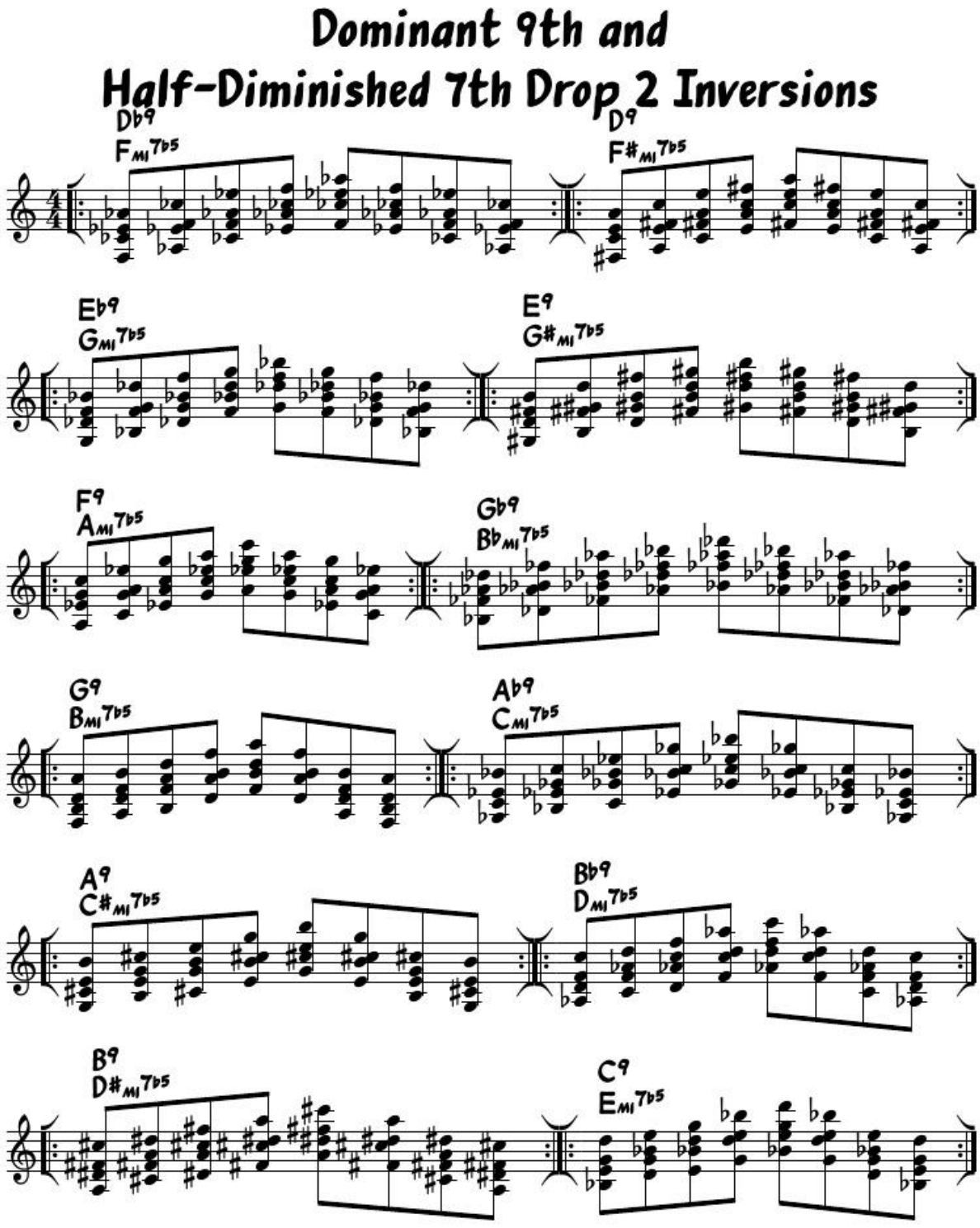
Exercise 8: Major 9th drop 2 chord voicing inversions.



Exercise 9: Minor 9th drop 2 chord voicing inversions.



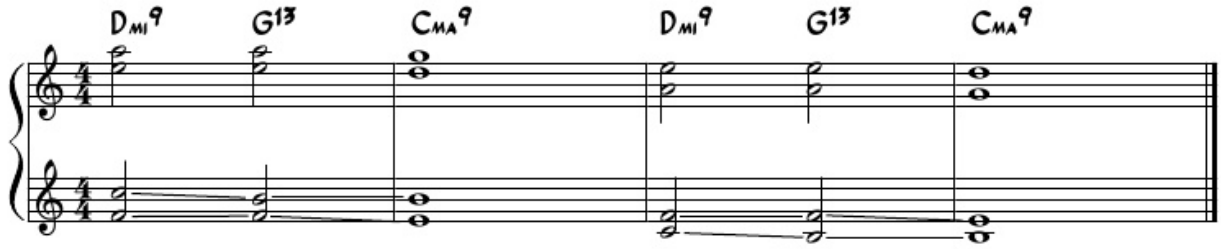
Exercise 10: Dominant 9th and half-diminished 7th drop 2 chord voicing inversions.



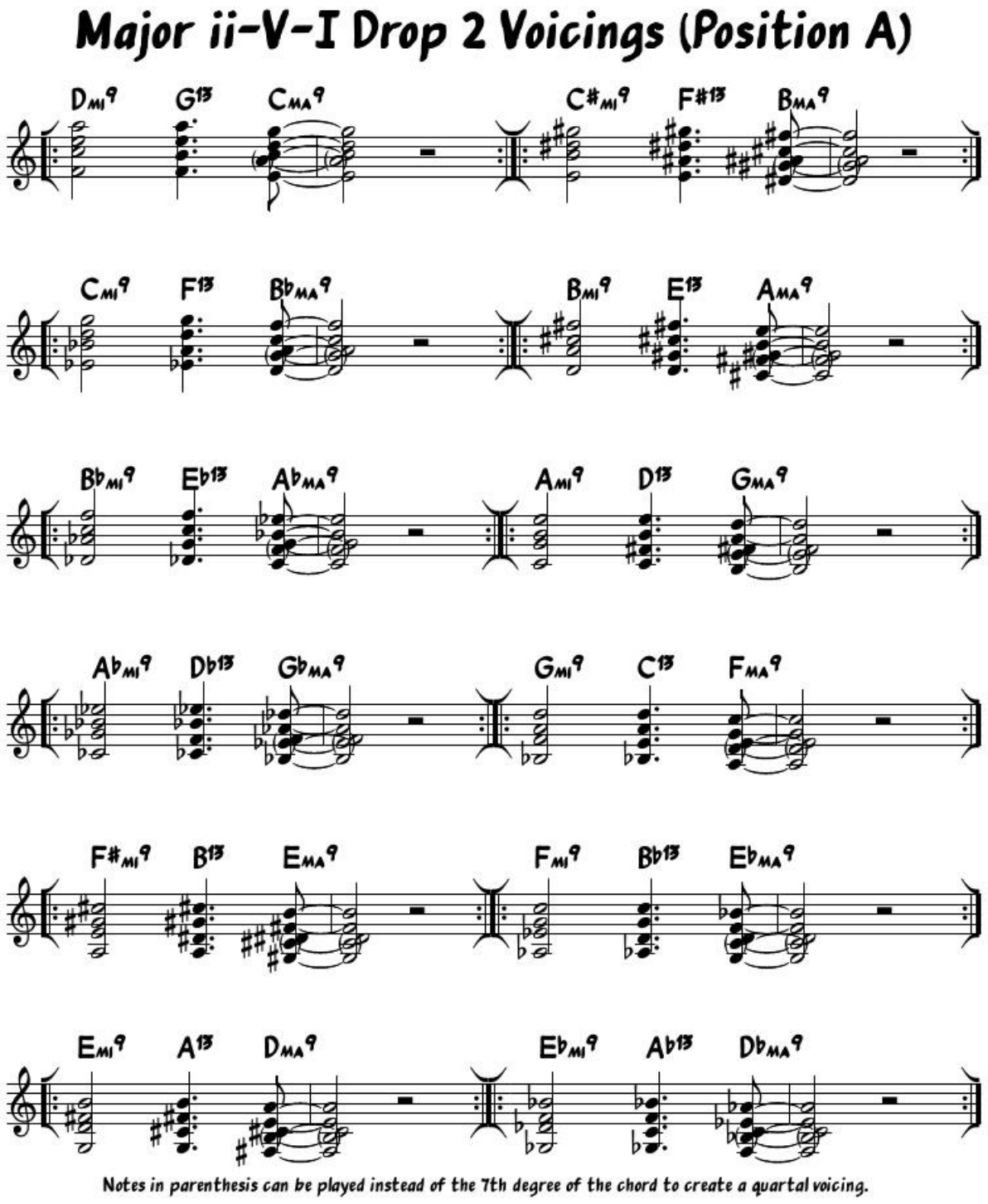
3.4 DROP 2 ii-V-I PROGRESSIONS

In section 3 of this chapter, we introduced drop 2 voicings and became comfortable applying them to different types of chords. In this section, drop 2 voicings are applied to both Major ii-V-I and minor iiø-V-i progressions. We will work through two inversions, starting with the 3rd degree of the chord in the low voice (position A), and then with the 7th degree in the low voice (position B). With these voicings, notice that the 3rd and 7th degrees of the chords will always be played in the left hand. In addition, the 7th degree of the chord will resolve down to or become the 3rd degree of the subsequent chord voicing, and the 3rd degree of the chord will resolve or become the 7th degree of the next chord in this progression (see fig. 32). Additionally, alternate voicings are notated for the tonic chords in the exercises. Practice these with a metronome starting at ♩=30 bpm. Work towards and build upon your fastest comfortable tempo.

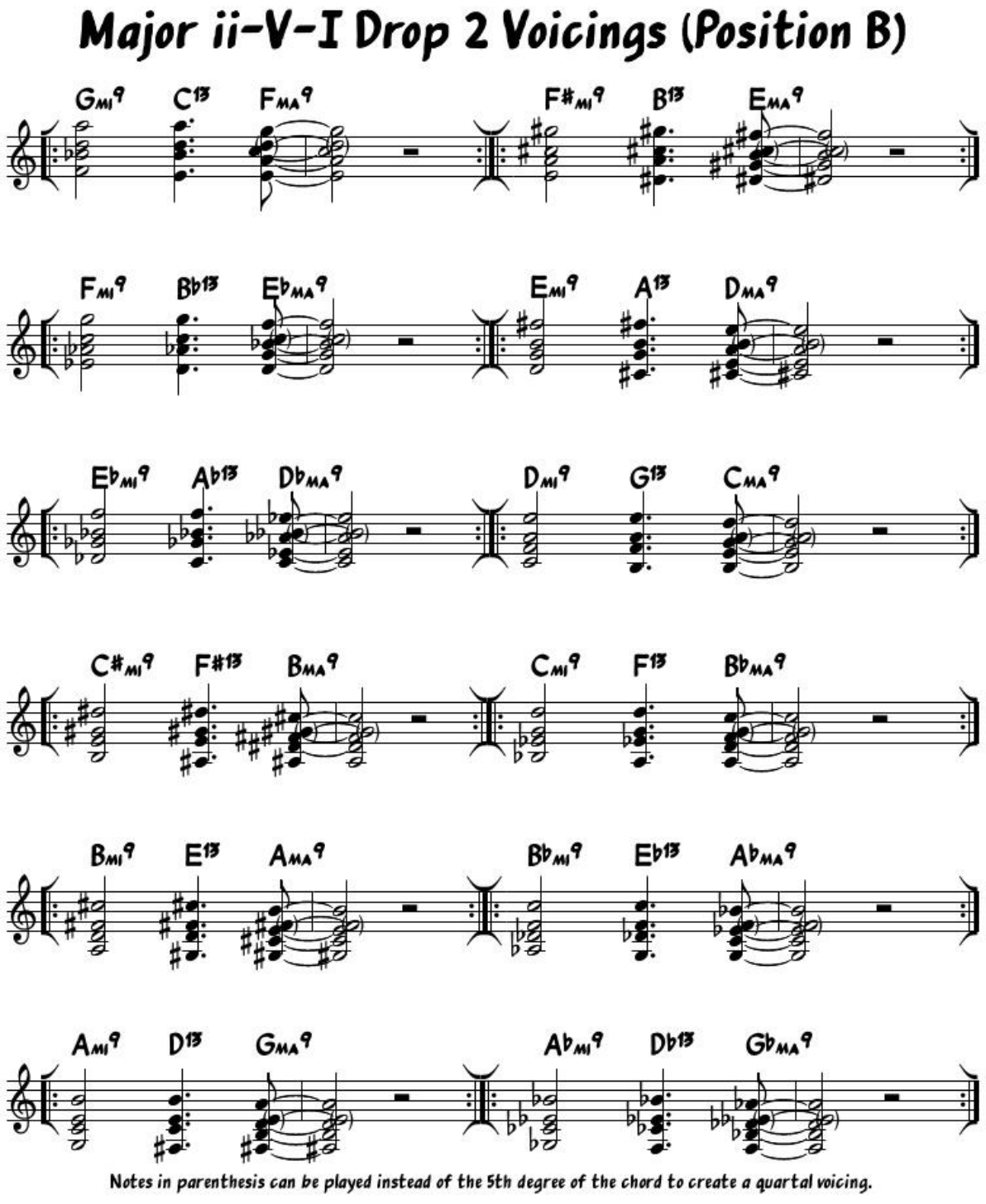
Fig. 32: Notice the voice leading occurring in the notes played with the left hand.



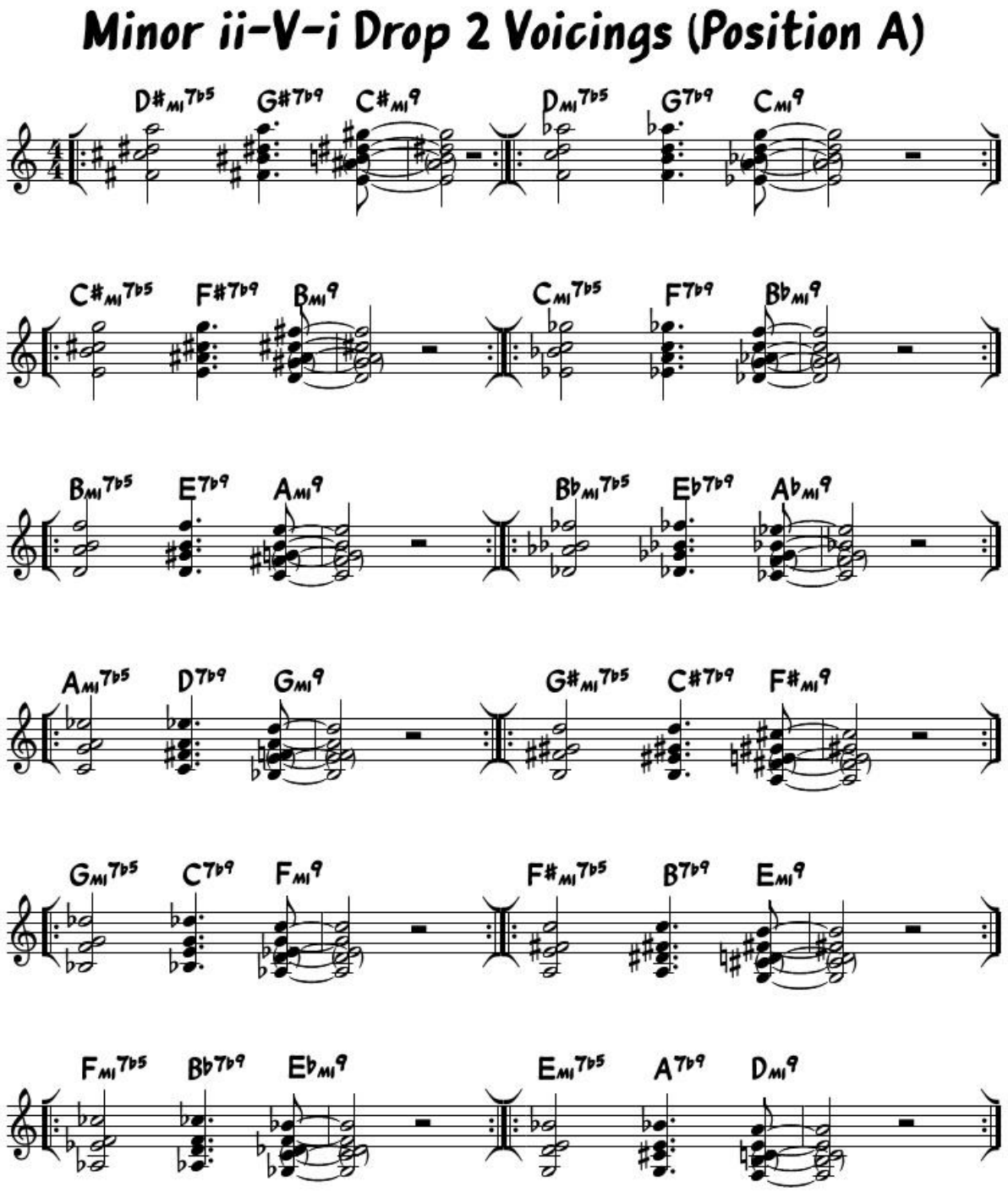
Exercise 11: Major ii-V-1 drop 2 chord progression voicings (position A).



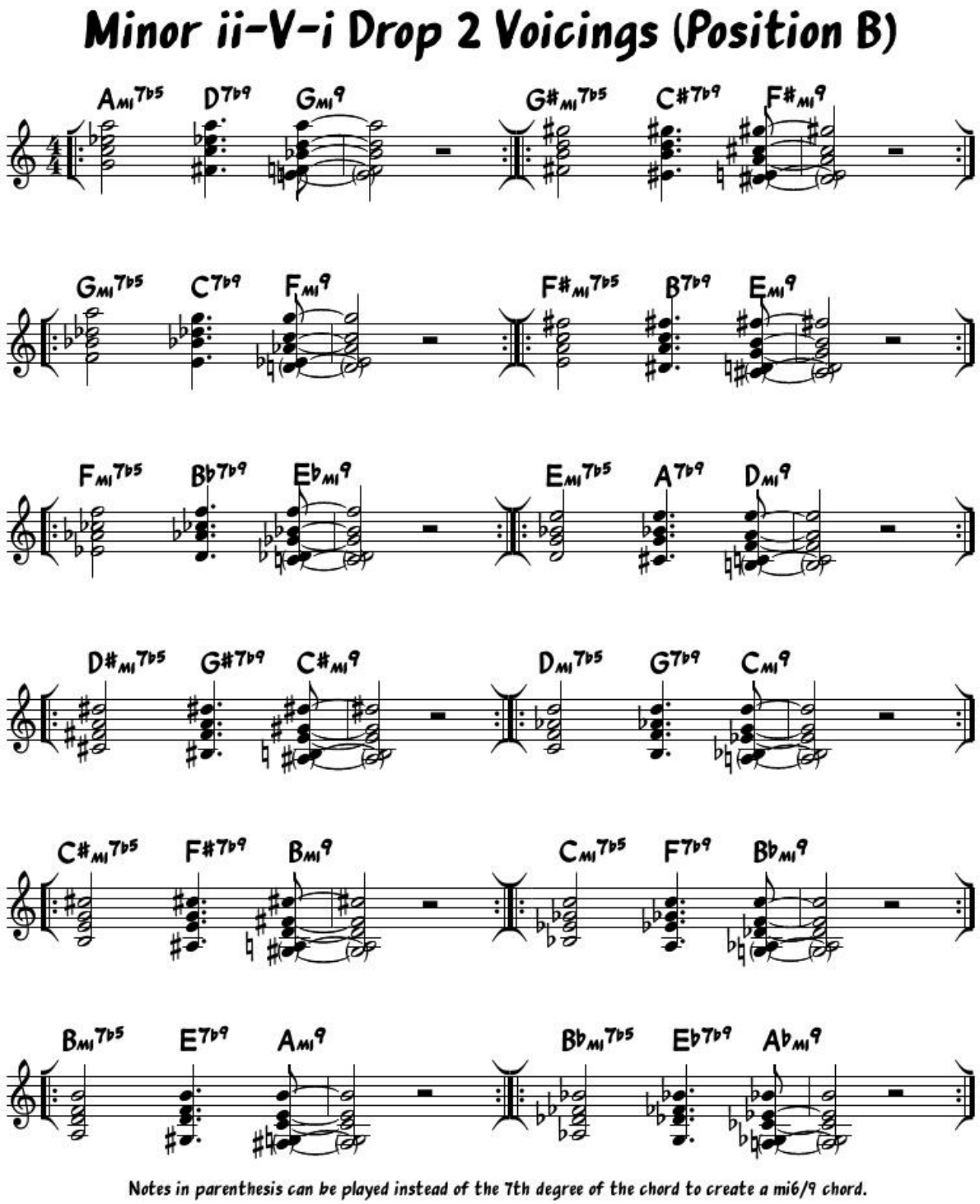
Exercise 12: Major ii-V-1 drop 2 chord progression voicings (position B).



Exercise 13: Minor ii-V-i drop 2 chord progression voicings (position A).



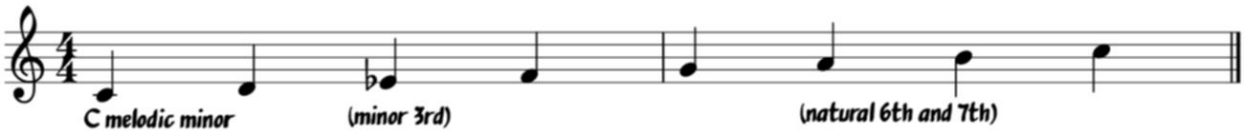
Exercise 14: Minor ii-V-i drop 2 chord progression voicings (position B).



3.5 ALTERED DOMINANTS, MELODIC MINOR, AND DIMINISHED SCALES

Within this chapter, both diminished scales and melodic minor scales are introduced, and their applications in the context of dominant chords are addressed. In jazz, we think of the melodic minor scale as a minor scale that has natural (or raised) 6th and 7th degrees of the scale. You can construct a melodic minor scale by lowering the 3rd degree of a major scale, or by raising the 6th and 7th scale degrees of a natural (or Aeolian) minor scale (see fig. 33).

Fig. 33: C melodic minor. Notice the minor 3rd and natural or raised 6th and 7th scale degrees.

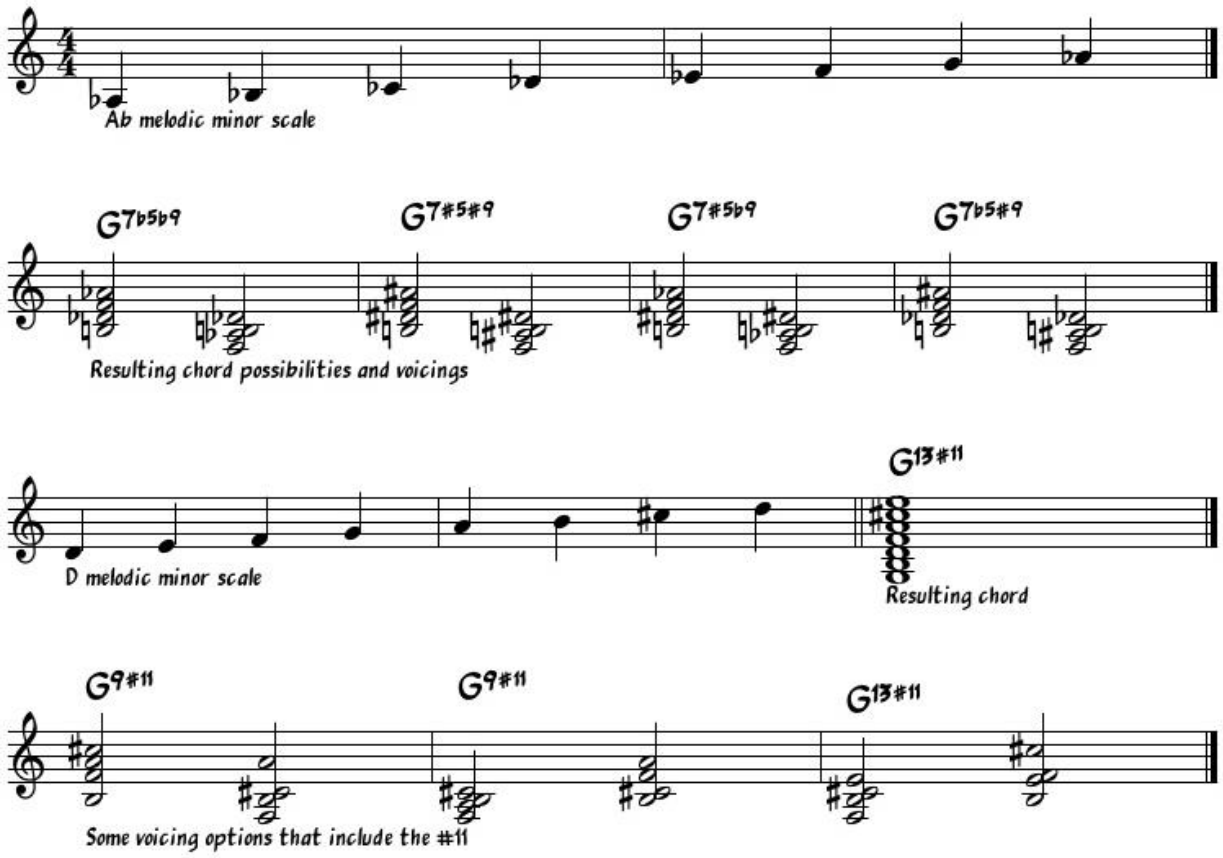


When building dominants chords, we have the option of using a melodic minor scale instead of the Mixolydian scale (or mode). Using a melodic minor scale will change some of the chord tones that would normally be present in the chord. The melodic minor scales that are most frequently applied to dominant function chords are the scale built starting a half step above the root of the chord, as well as the scale built starting a perfect 5th above the root. As an example, the scales relating to a G dominant chord would be Ab melodic minor and D melodic minor. Using the Ab melodic minor scale will result in a fully altered G dominant 7th chord. Ab and A# become voicing options as the b9th and #9th degrees of the chord, and Db and D# become options as the b5th, #5th, or the #11 or b13 degrees of the chord. With the four altered notes to choose from, there are multiple possibilities for voicings built from this scale (see fig. 34). In addition to the chord symbols listed below, you may also see G7alt notated when referring to this specific chord-scale relationship.

Using the D melodic minor scale results in a G dominant 7th chord with only one altered note (C#). This is an upper altered extension of the chord, and functions as the #11th. Since this chord tone is the only altered note within the chord, it is what defines and makes this chord sound unique. The 9th

and 13th degrees of the chord remain unaltered and are also frequently used in voicings of this chord. With the limitations of four-mallet playing, we cannot play both leading tones as well as all of the upper extensions of this chord simultaneously. Instead, we must choose which chord voices to exclude in our voicings. See fig. 34 for some of these voicing options. In addition to its application over a V7 chord, this particular chord-scale relationship is also frequently used over the "back door" progression (a bVII7 chord resolving to the tonic chord).

Fig. 34: Ab and D melodic minor scales applied to a G7 chord, with resulting chord voicing possibilities.

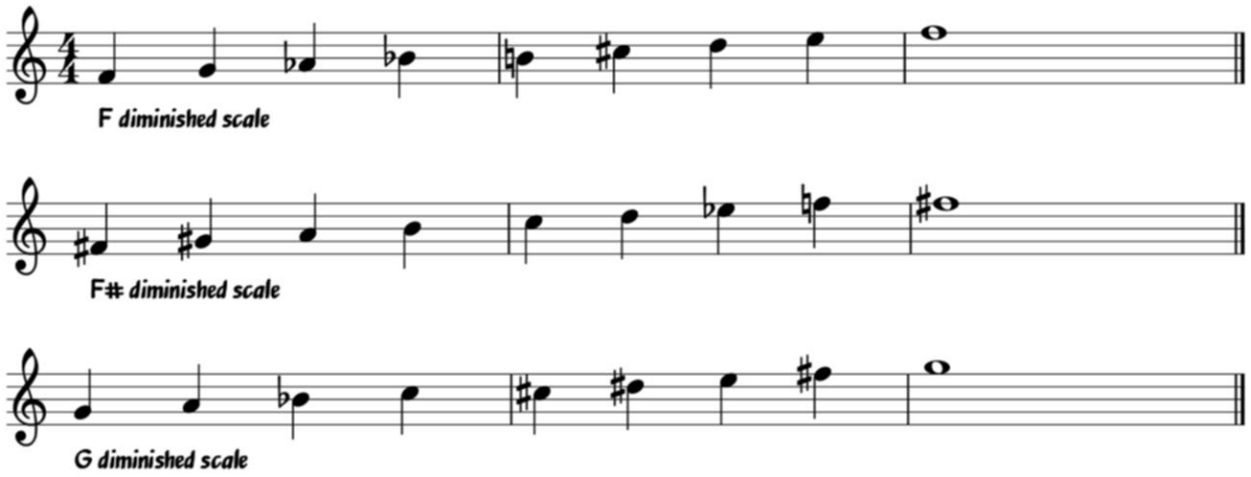


Alternatively, if we wanted to play a voicing that included more than 4 notes, we could achieve this sound by holding down the pedal and playing the notes with a series of two or more attacks.

In addition to using melodic minor scales to build dominant chords, we can also use the diminished or octatonic scale. This scale is built with a series of whole and half steps, and because of

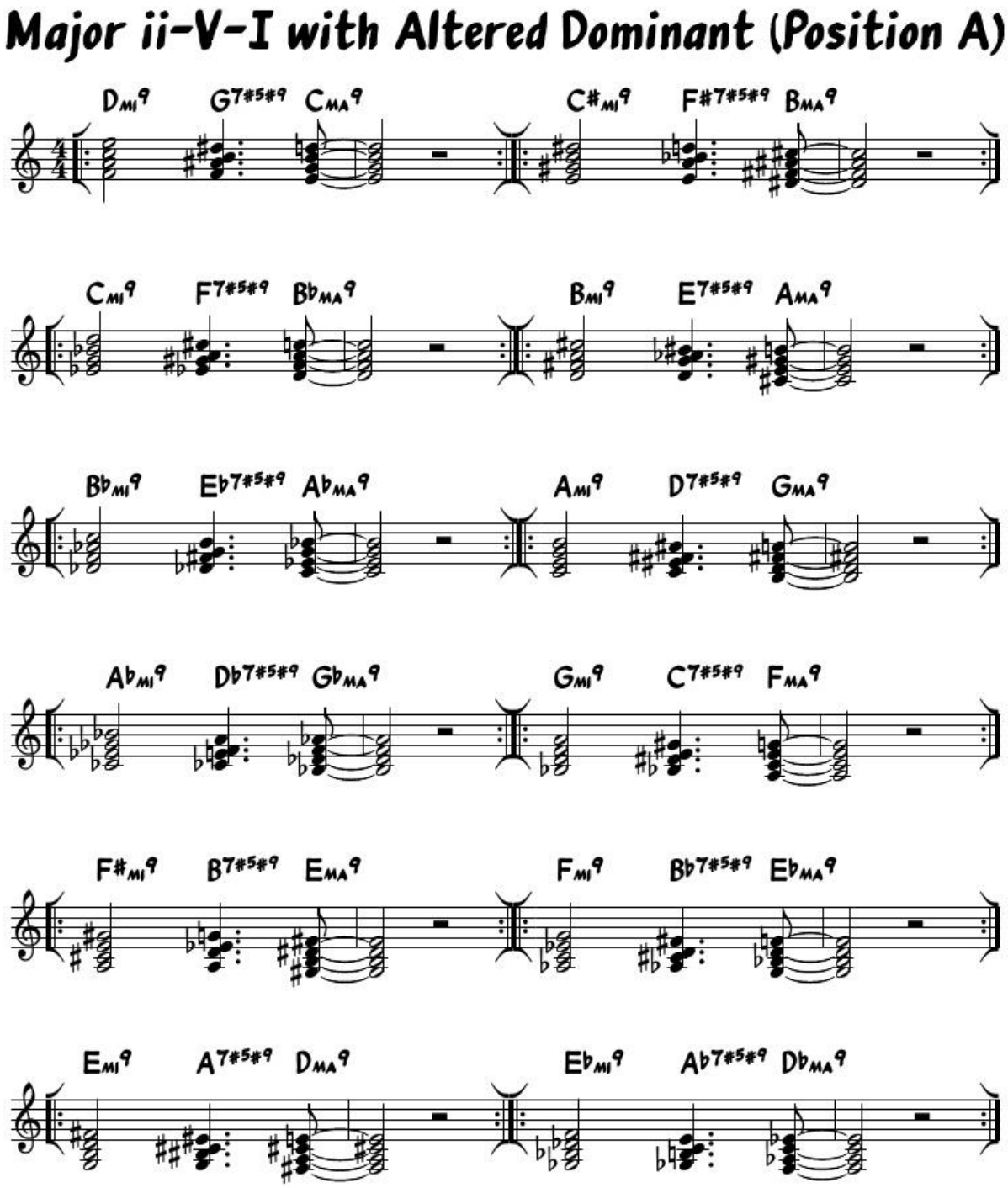
its symmetry, there are only 3 different diminished scales and chords. This is because every minor third repeats. Therefore, diminished scales built off of F, Ab, B, and D all share the same pitch collection. The same is true for F#, A, C, and Eb, as well as for G, Bb, Db, and E (see fig. 35).

Fig. 35: Diminished scales: Note that the F diminished scale is the same as the Ab diminished, B diminished, and D diminished scales. The F# diminished scale is the same as the A, C, and Eb diminished scales, and the G diminished scale is the same as the Bb, Db, and E diminished scales.

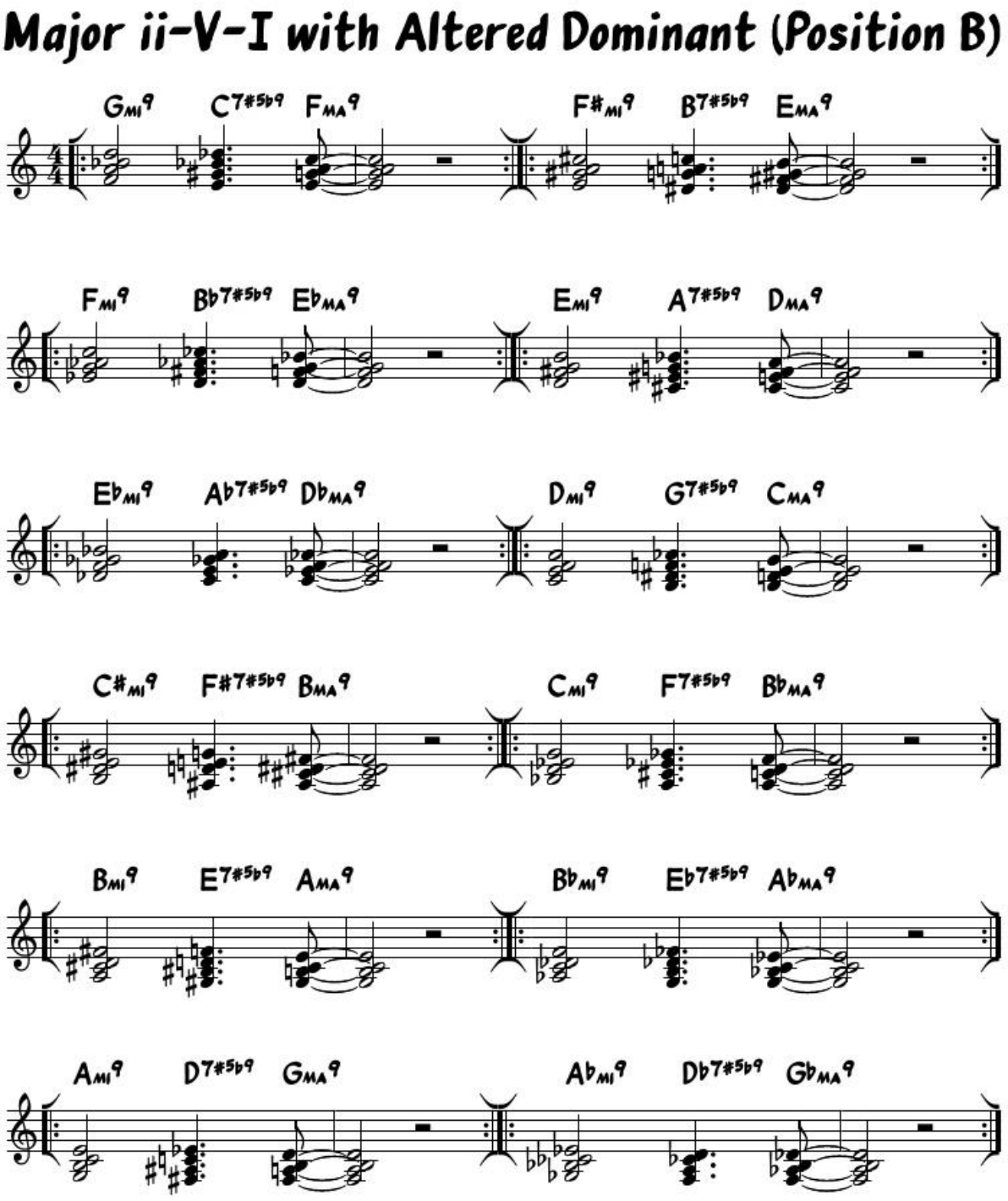


In the exercises of this chapter, we will apply these chord-scale relationships to ii-V-I progressions. We will also work through diminished chordal patterns in order to become comfortable playing diminished chords around the instrument. Practice these exercises with a metronome starting at ♩=30 bpm, and gradually increase your speed. Work towards increasing your fastest comfortable tempo.

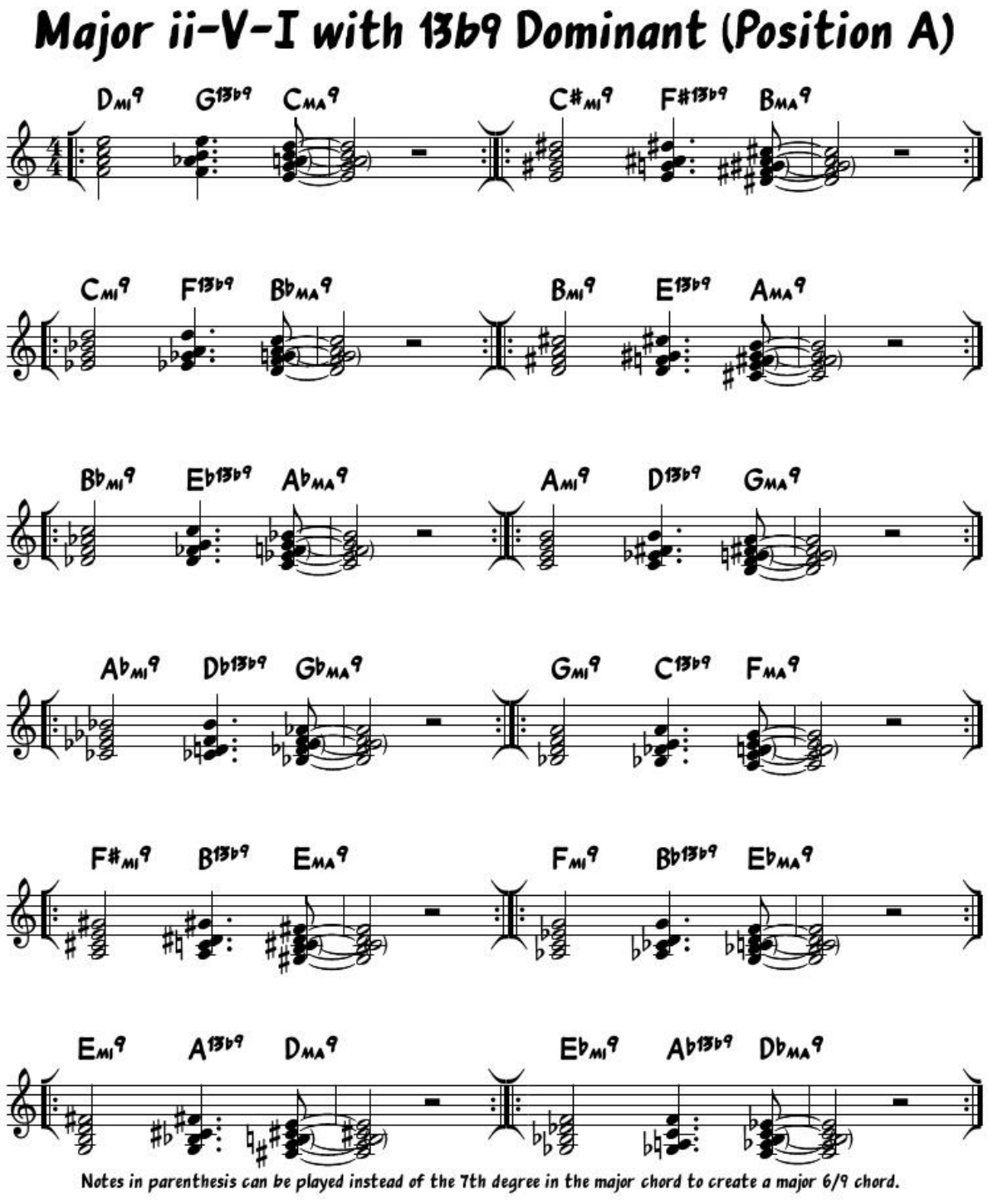
Exercise 15: Major ii-V-1 chord progression voicings with altered dominant (position A).



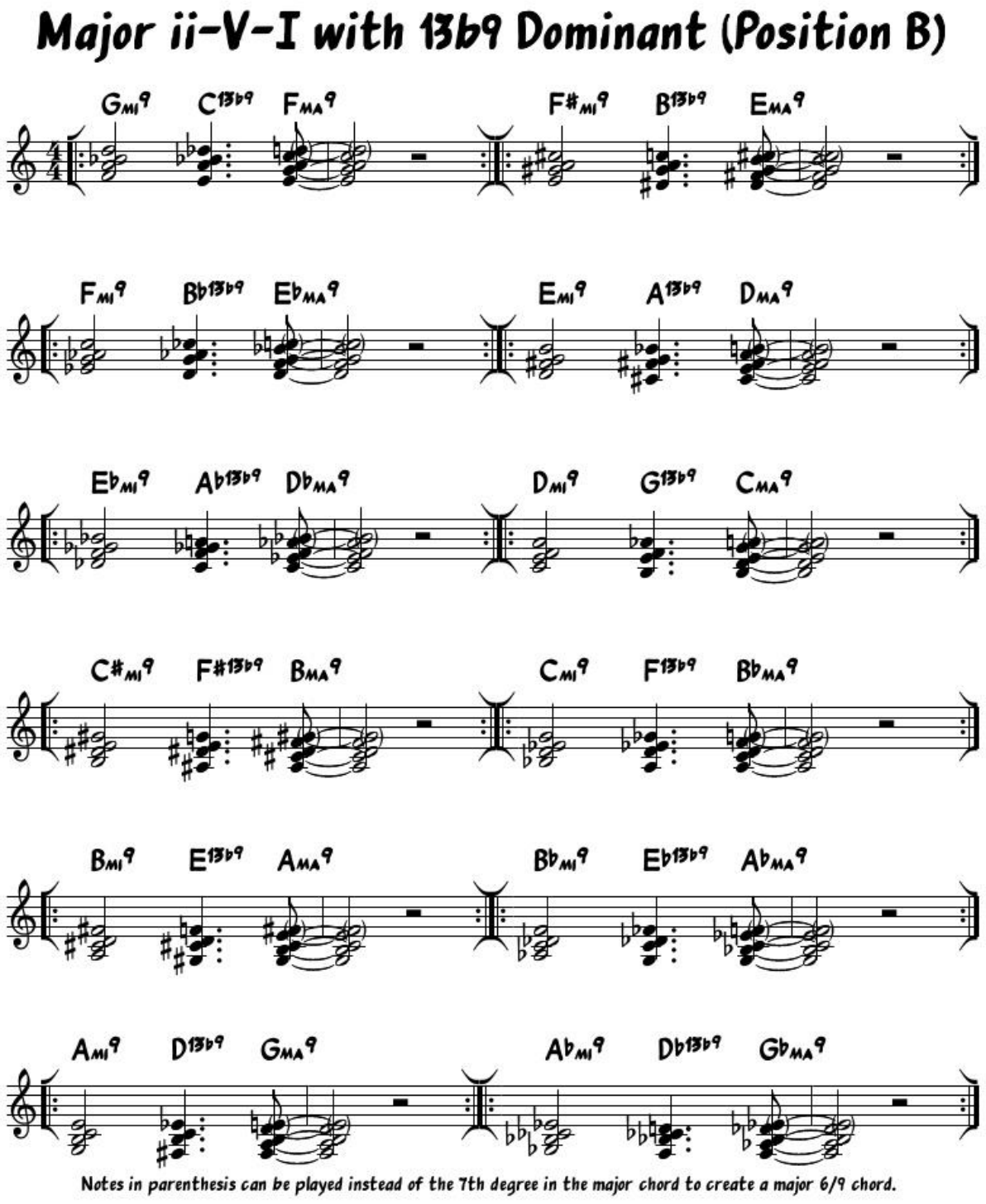
Exercise 16: Major ii-V-1 chord progression voicings with altered dominant (position B).



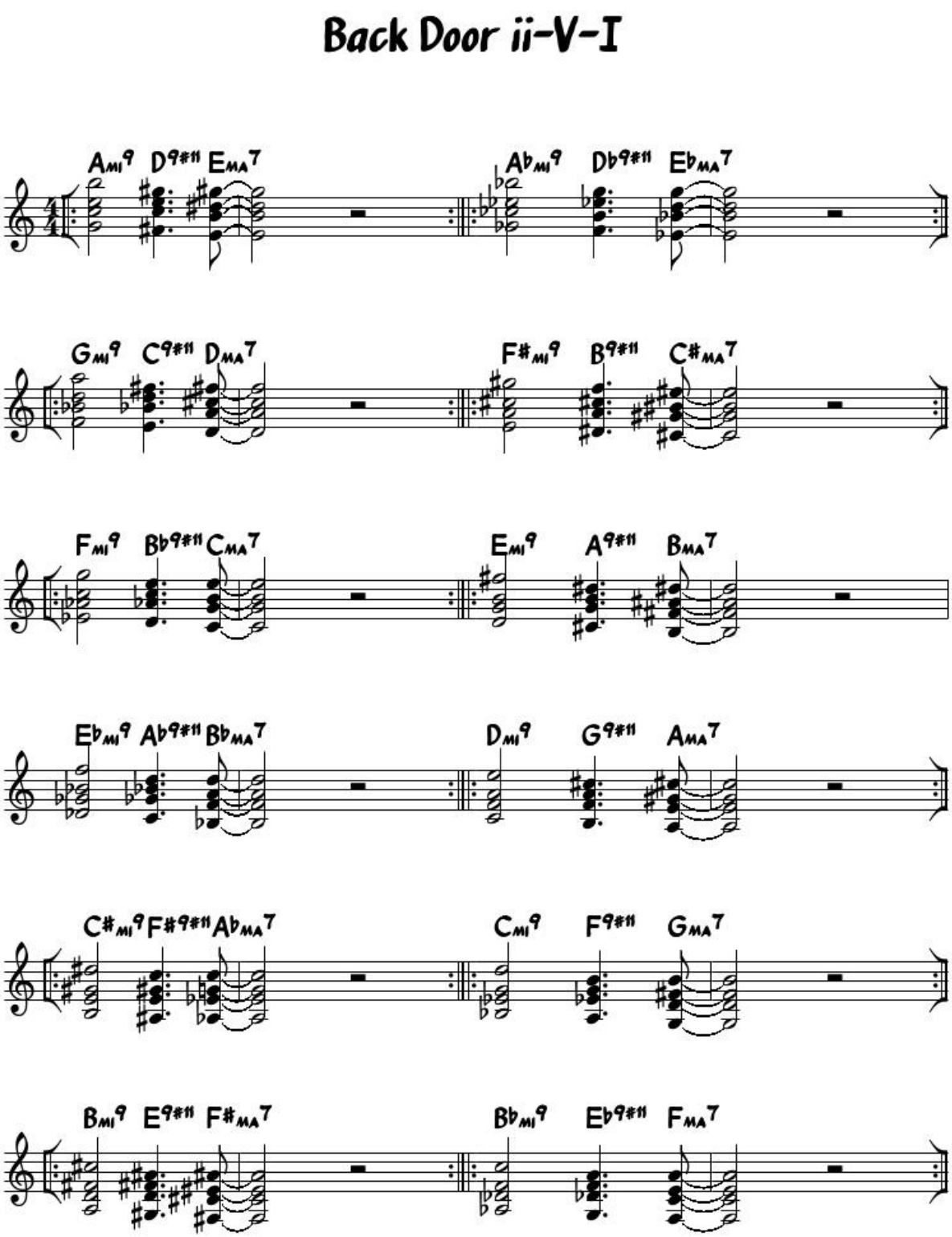
Exercise 17: Major ii-V-1 chord progression voicings with 13b9 dominant (position A).



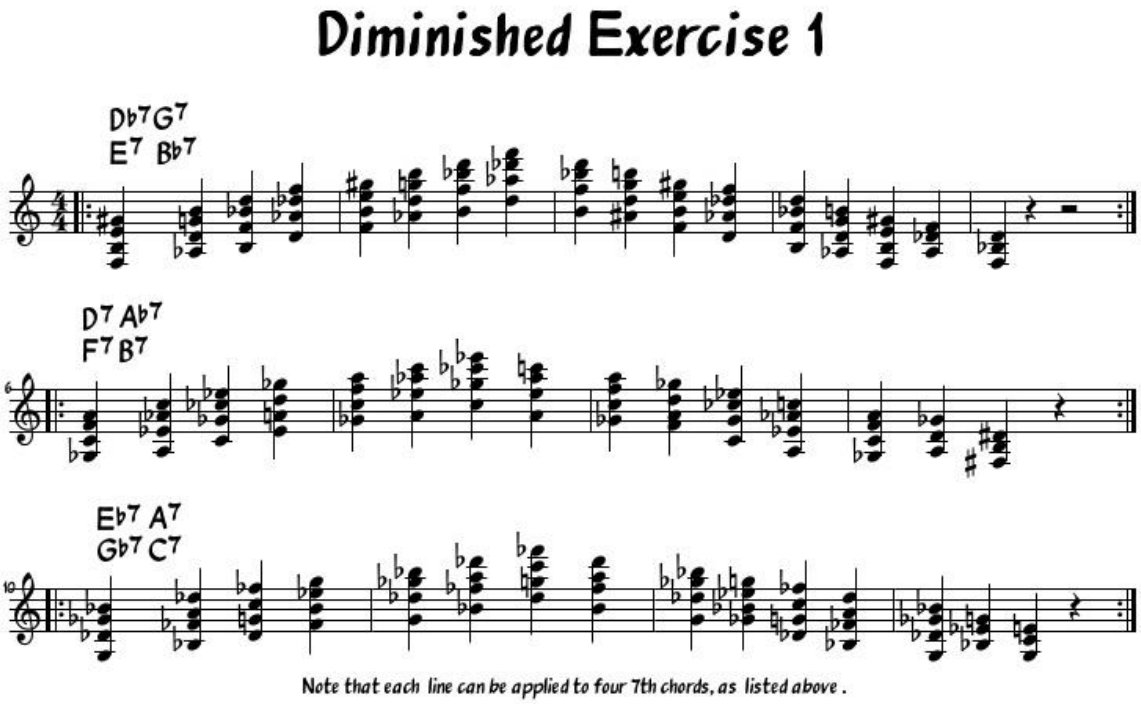
Exercise 18: Major ii-V-1 chord progression voicings with 13b9 dominant (position B).



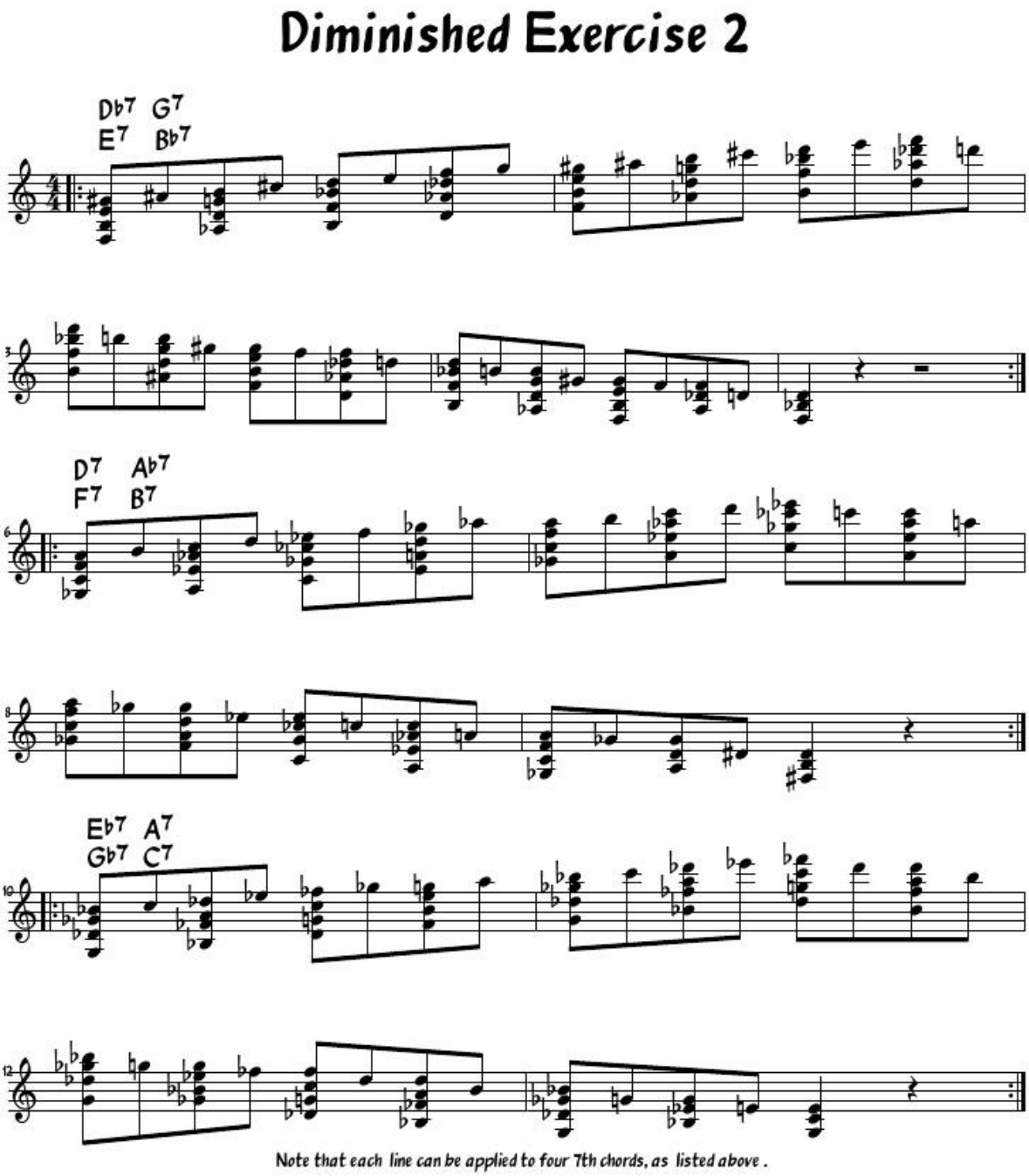
Exercise 19: "Back door" ii-V-I (iv-bVII-I) chord progression voicings with 9#11 dominant.



Exercise 20: Diminished exercise 1.



Exercise 21: Diminished exercise 2.



CHAPTER 4: APPLYING PIANISTIC CHORDAL SOLO TECHNIQUES TO THE VIBRAPHONE

4.1 MILT BUCKNER: EARLY BLOCK CHORD SOLOING WITH AN ANALYSIS OF HIS SOLO ON EVIL GAL BLUES

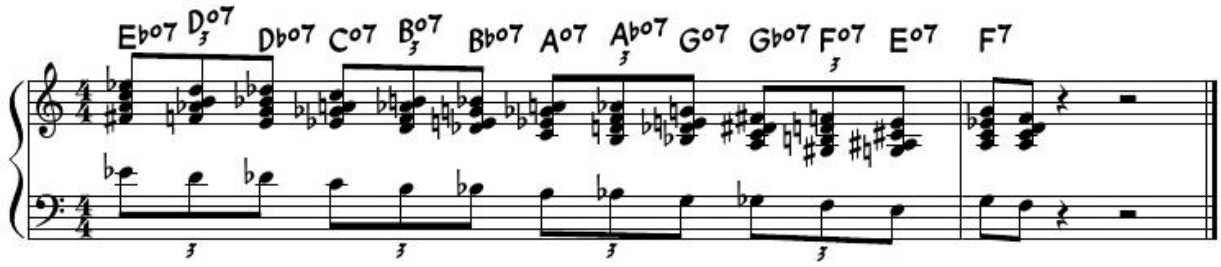
Milt Buckner was born on July 10, 1915 in St. Louis, Missouri. At the age of nine, he moved to Detroit to live with his uncle John Tobias, who was a trombonist in the Earl Walton Orchestra. He began playing piano, and by his mid-teens, he was writing arrangements for his uncle's group. Buckner's talent for arranging did not go unnoticed, and in 1932, he joined a group led by drummer Don Cox. During this time, Milt Buckner began developing the "locked hand" or "block chord" style of playing, which would be adopted by countless jazz pianists.[1] Of note, Milt Buckner was the pianist and arranger for Lionel Hampton's big band from 1941-1948.

A great example of his "locked hands" style can be heard on Dinah Washington's 1943 recording of *Evil Gal Blues*. On the recording, Buckner begins the recording with an improvised intro. He plays three choruses, using his "locked hands" approach almost exclusively. Listening to the recording, his interest and experience in arranging for larger ensembles is apparent, as what he plays is very similar to what one might hear in a big band arrangement.

Buckner begins by playing descending chromatic minor thirds in his right hand, along with a descending bass line in his left hand in measures 1-3. In measure 4, Buckner begins to use a "locked hands" approach, playing a fast descending line of diminished seventh chords (see fig. 36). From this point on, his solo is composed almost entirely using this "locked hands" approach.

1. Mazurkiewicz, Margaret. *Contemporary Black Biography*. Vol. 110. Detroit: Gale, 2014.

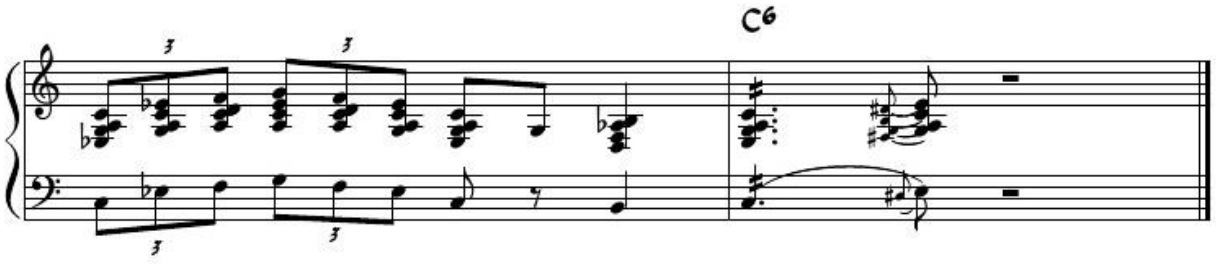
Fig. 36: Buckner's use of descending diminished 7th chords in the "locked hands" style in Evil Gal Blues (mm.4-5).



Looking at the application of this style of playing, Buckner plays a closed position four-note chord in his right hand, while doubling the top, or melody line in his left hand an octave below. This is the reason for the term "locked hands". His playing is both bluesy and melodic throughout, and very reminiscent of what a horn section would play in groups like Lionel Hampton's big band. Upon further analysis, Buckner uses minor 6th and major 6th chord voicings quite a bit throughout this example, but he also uses other chords and ideas that help make the solo more interesting.

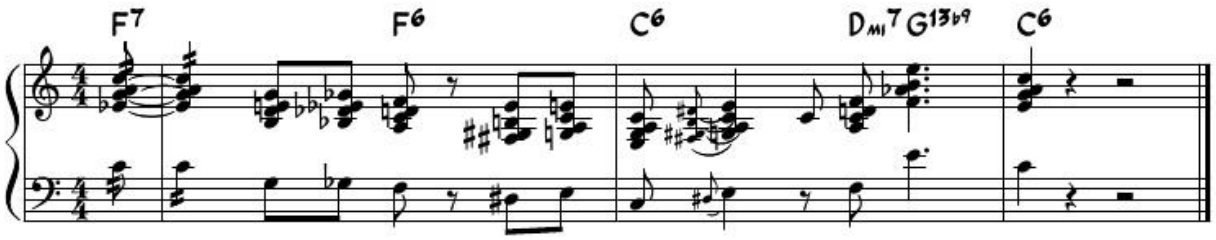
In many of his lines, he plays inversions of 6th chords, but creates some variation by playing passing chords. In measure 6 as an example, Buckner plays an ascending and descending line made up of inversions of a Cmi6 chord. In this example, Buckner plays a voicing of D half-diminished as a passing chord between two inversions of Cmi6. Also, notice that while Buckner is playing over the IV chord (F), he plays inversions of F9 (or Cmi6), but when the harmony switches to the I chord (C7), he plays inversions of Cma6. This use of major sounds for the I chord and minor sounds for the IV chord can be heard throughout his solo (see fig. 37).

Fig. 37: Cmi6 inversions with a D half-diminished passing chord in Buckner's solo on Evil Gal Blues (mm. 6-7).



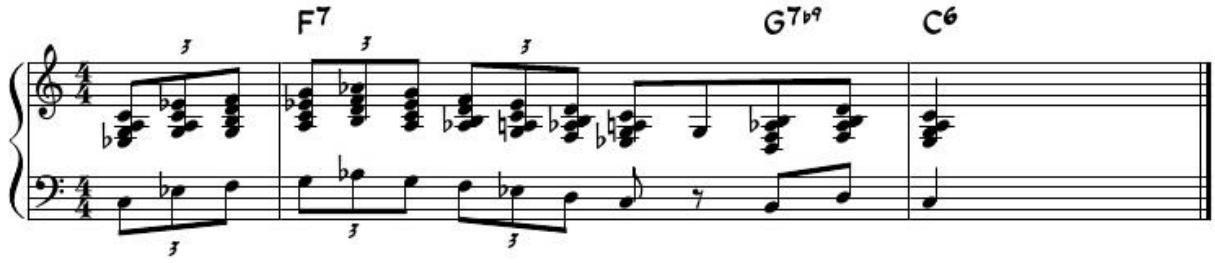
Another concept that Buckner uses frequently throughout this solo is chromaticism. An example of this can be heard in the turnaround, I-iim7-V7-I, of the first chorus. Looking at measure 10, Buckner plays a descending chromatic line starting on beat two. He also uses chromaticism starting on beat four, playing a voicing of B6 to lead into C6, as well as on the upbeat of beat 1 of the measure 11 (see fig. 38).

Fig. 38: Buckner's use of chromaticism in Evil Gal Blues (mm. 9-12).



Another notable use of passing chords can be heard in the turnaround of the second chorus. Starting in measure 21, Buckner plays an ascending, then descending line that incorporates inversions of Cmi6. In this particular example, he uses diminished 7^{ths} as passing chords (see fig. 39).

Fig. 39: Ascending and descending line using inversions of Cmi6 and diminished 7th passing chords in Evil Gal Blues (mm. 21-23).

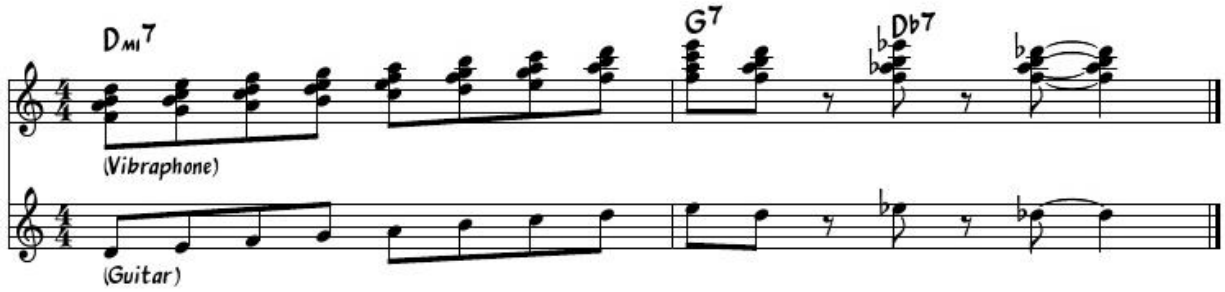


While there are many recordings of “block chord” piano playing, this is a great early example that demonstrates the historical roots of this style. I hear a close connection to the arranging style of big band horn parts in this example, as well as in Buckner's playing in general. Using diminished chords for non-chord tones, as well as chromatic chordal passages was common in big band arranging during this time period.

There are examples of block chord playing on vibraphone, but the recorded examples of this are few and far between. Of note, Red Norvo uses block chords in the arrangements for his trio recordings. A good example of this can be heard on *I Can't Believe That You're in Love with Me* from his record *Move!*, released under the Savoy label in 1956.

Norvo's block chord soli arrangement in *I Can't Believe That You're in Love with Me* is very innovative, but it should be noted that the part was pre-written, while Buckner's solo on *Evil Gal Blues* was improvised. In Norvo's example, the “block chords” are arranged as part of a soli, where he plays a four-note closed position voicing, while guitar doubles the melody an octave below. Like Buckner's chordal voicings, Norvo's arrangement uses closed position voicings with the melody doubled an octave below (see fig.40).

Fig. 40: Excerpt of Norvo's soli from I Can't Believe That You're in Love with Me.



There are differences worth noting between the Buckner and Norvo examples however. In fig. 39, Buckner incorporates passing diminished 7th chords into his line. Norvo in contrast uses only chord voicings diatonic to the key of C major until the Db7 in the second measure (see fig. 40).

That being said, there are also some similarities between the two recordings. For example, both incorporate chromaticism into their lines (see figs. 41 and 42). In both of the examples, chromaticism is used, with a B6 chord leading into a C6 chord.

Fig. 41: Norvo's use of Chromaticism in I Can't Believe That You're in Love with Me.

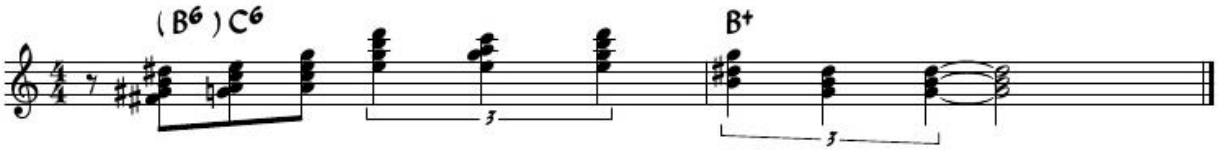
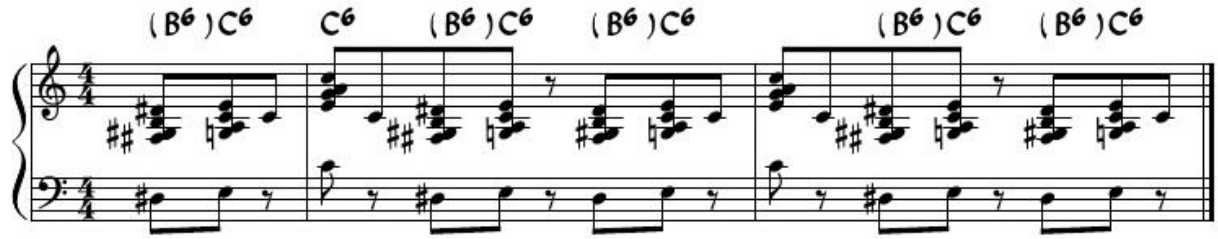
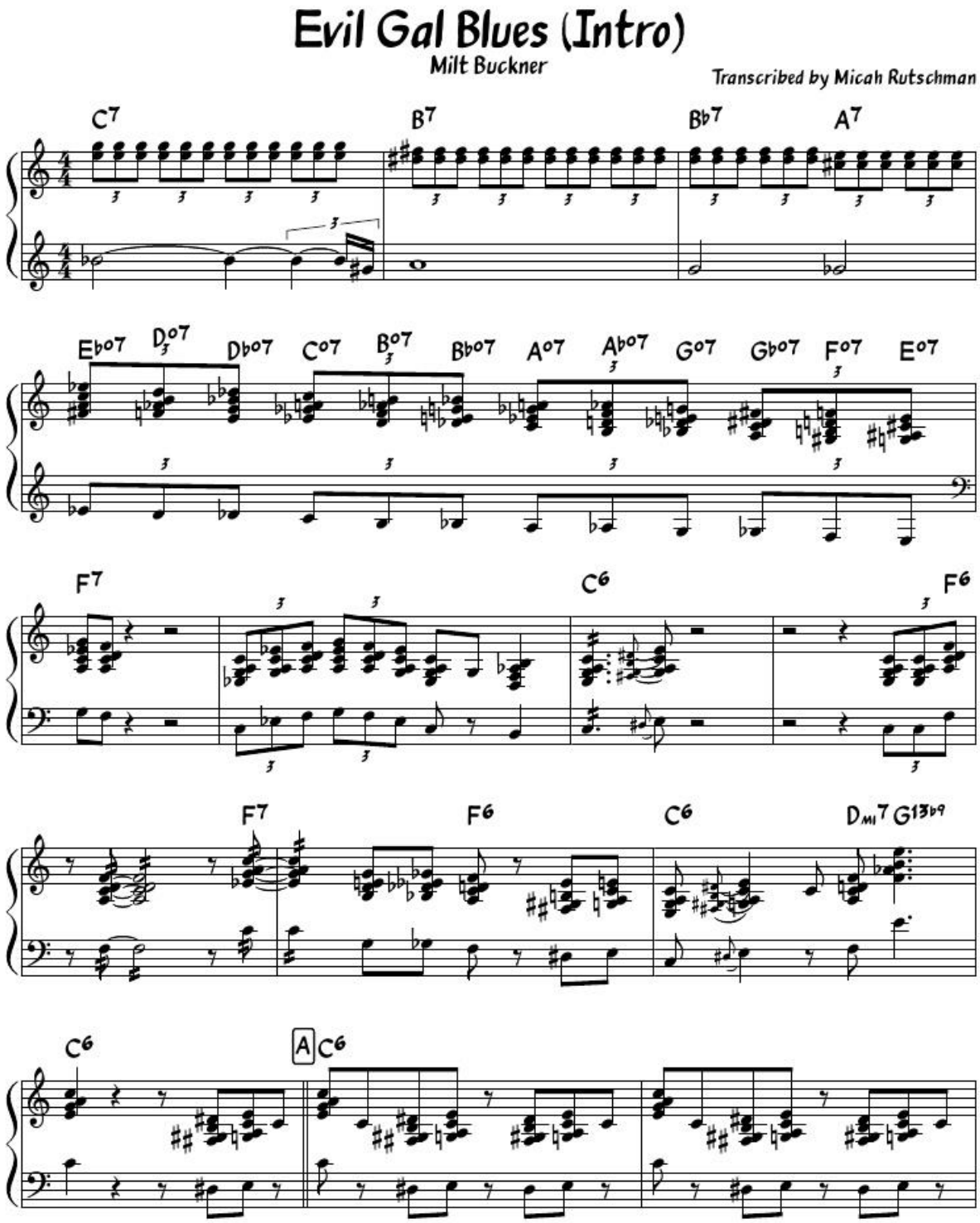


Fig. 42: Buckner's use of Chromaticism in Evil Gal Blues (mm. 13-14).

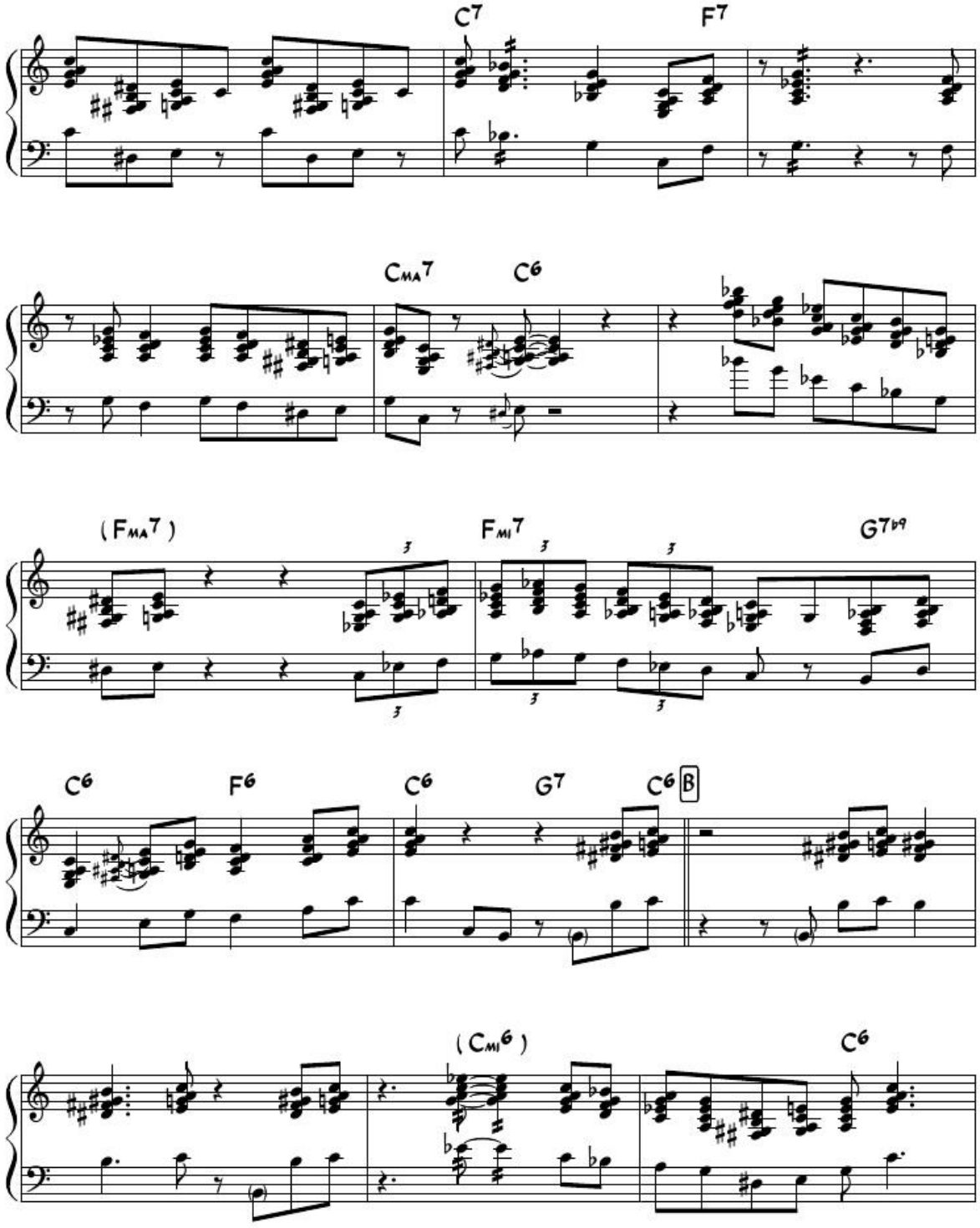


A full transcription of Buckner's solo is included on the following pages. While his solo cannot be played on the vibraphone exactly as it is written, the concepts that Buckner utilizes in his solo can still be applied to the vibraphone. To explore this, I have also included an adaptation of his solo for the vibraphone, as well as insight into how to apply his “locked hands” style to the vibraphone

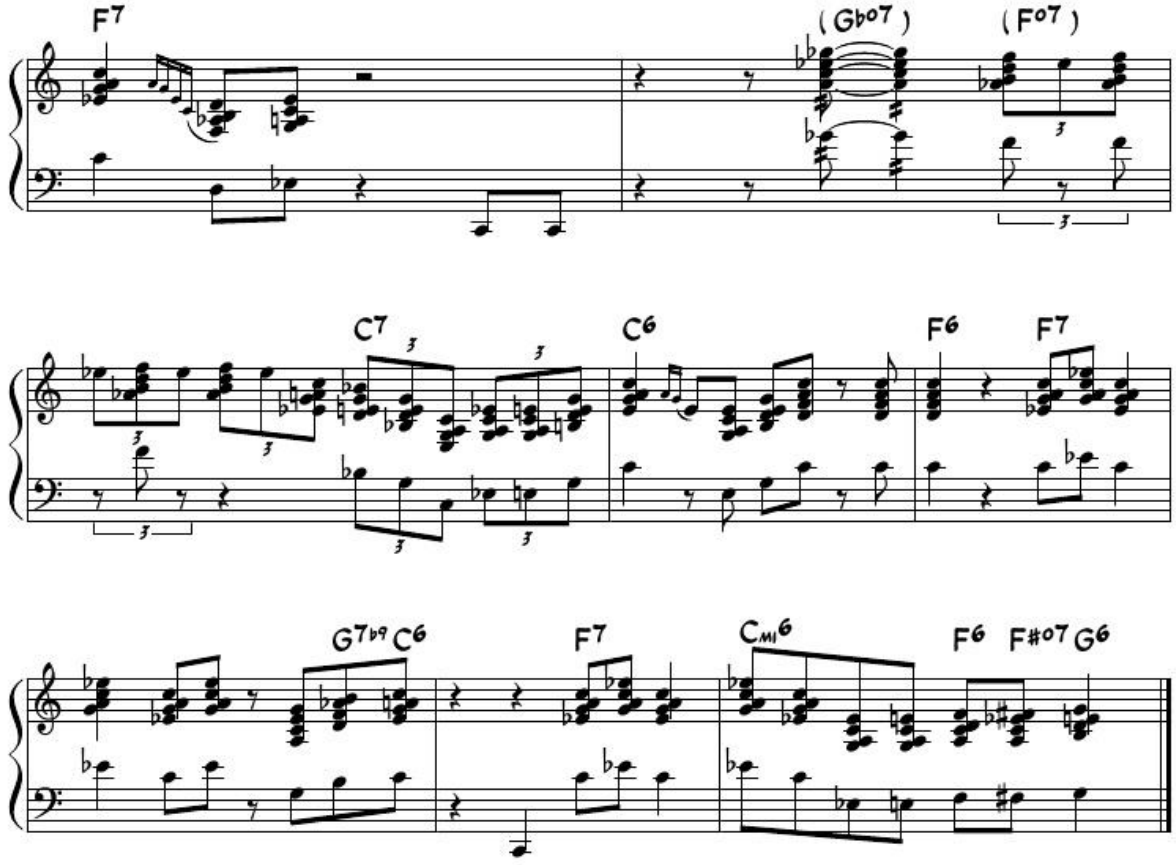
Example 1: Transcription of Milt Buckner's solo on Evil Gal Blues.



Example 1 (cont.)



Example 1 (cont.)



4.1.1 ADAPTING BUCKNER'S SOLO ON EVIL GAL BLUES TO THE VIBRAPHONE

A main purpose of this dissertation is to address the application of pianistic chordal concepts to the vibraphone, and with this in mind, I want to discuss how the concepts that Milt Buckner uses in his solo in *Evil Gal Blues* can be applied to the vibraphone. While the "locked hands" approach demonstrated in Buckner's example uses five notes, vibraphonists typically only hold four mallets, which limits the performer to four-note chord voicings when approaching "block chord" styles. Although excluding a note changes the sound of the chord voicing, the overall effect of the "locked hands" approach can convincingly be achieved on the vibraphone.

To apply this technique to the vibraphone, the simple solution is to exclude the lowest pitch, which is typically played by the pianist's left hand. The pitch is doubling the melody, and without it present, the fundamental chord sounds are still present. Red Norvo's example discussed and shown in fig. 40 takes this approach, with the addition of guitar to play the missing low voice. Buckner's ideas are very playable on the vibraphone, once the line played in his left hand is taken out.

One of the main issues when adapting a piano solo to vibraphone however, is the issue of range. The piano has a range of over seven octaves, from A0 to C8. A standard vibraphone however has a range of 3 octaves, from F3 to F6. Many of the chordal voicings in the piano solos that I discuss use pitches that go above and below the standard vibraphone range. In order to adapt these solos to vibraphone, I have either left notes out, or transposed sections of the solos up an octave.

Fig. 43 shows a phrase as Buckner played it, while fig. 44 shows how the same figure can be adapted to the vibraphone.

Fig. 43: Excerpt of Buckner's intro from Evil Gal Blues, showing Buckner's use of "locked hands" technique (mm. 4-7).

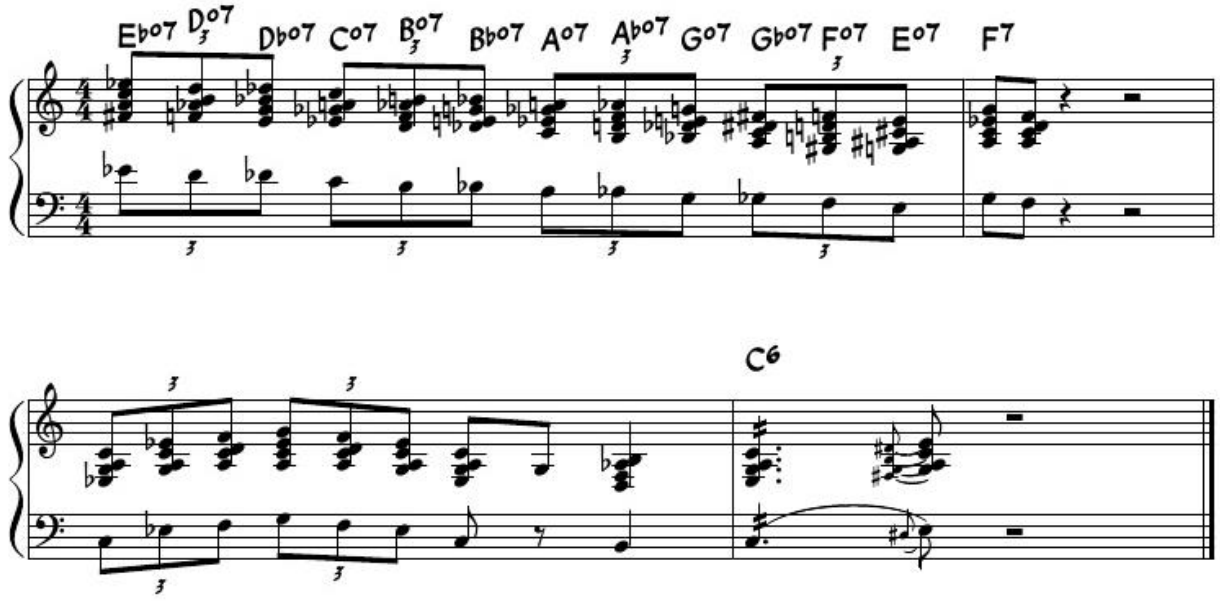
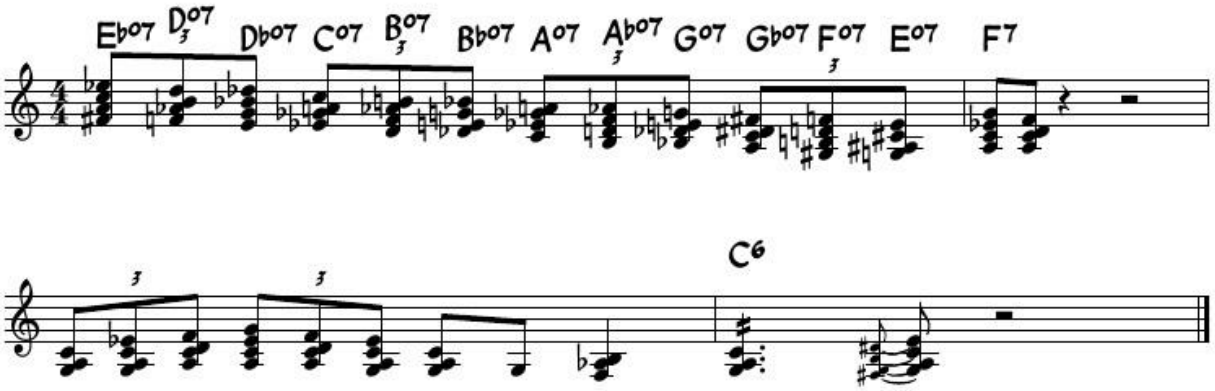


Fig. 44: Excerpt of Buckner's intro from Evil Gal Blues, adapted for vibraphone (mm.4-7).



In figure 44, I leave lower notes out of the voicings when they drop lower than the standard range of the vibraphone. I believe that there is enough chordal information to retain the harmonic sonority. Alternatively, you could also transpose the figure up an octave in order to play all of the notes in the voicing, with the exception of the lowest voice that doubles the melody. While playing the voicings an octave higher would allow you to play full four-note voicings, it extends out of the "sweet spot" on the vibraphone where chord voicings are typically considered to sound best.

Buckner's solo uses a “locked hands” approach for almost all of the material that he plays on the recording, with the exception of measures 1-3, and a few places throughout the solo where he plays one note instead of a chord voicing. (see figs. 45 and 46 below).

Fig. 45: Excerpt showing Buckner's block chord approach, with passing single melody notes (mm. 12-16).

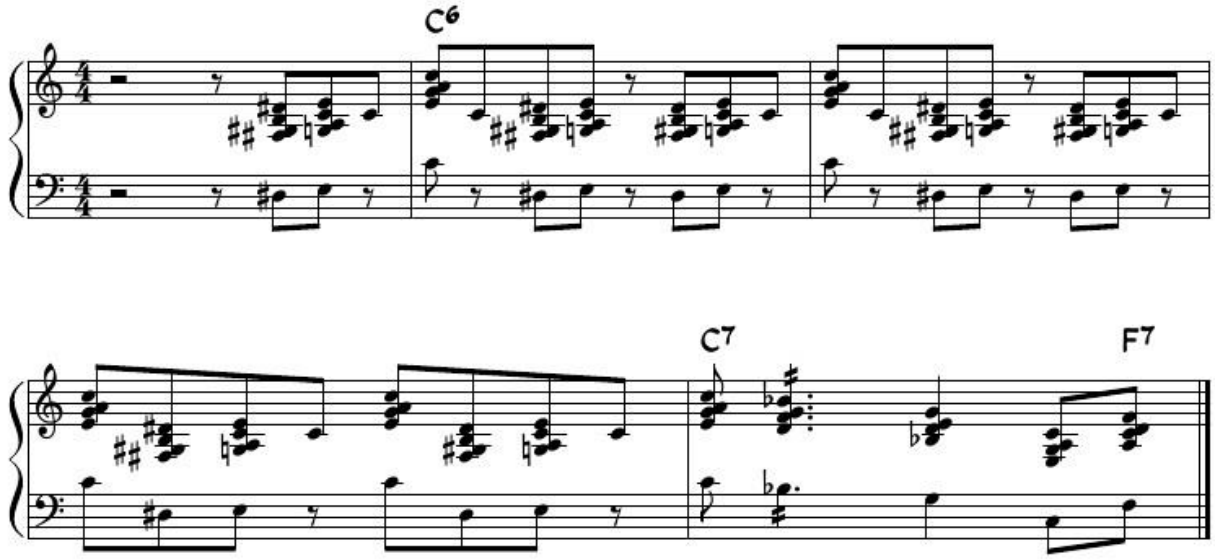
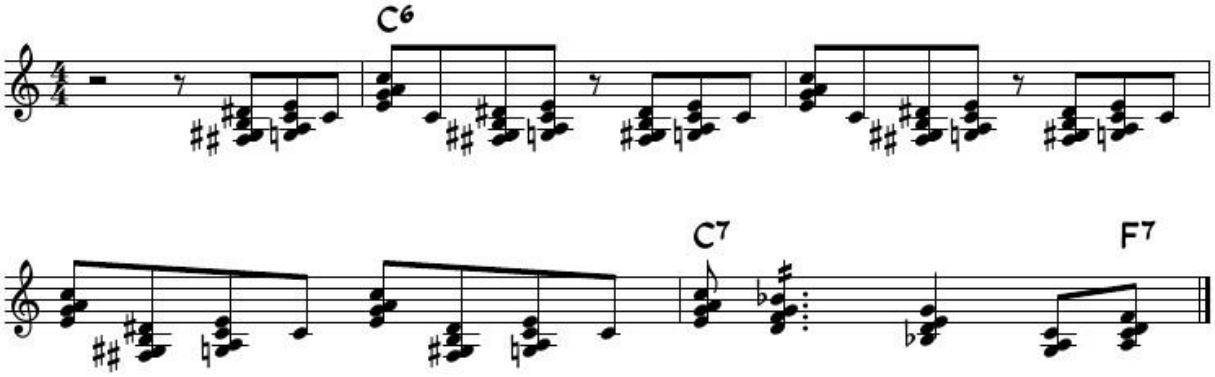


Fig. 46: Adaptation of excerpt above for vibraphone, with passing single melody notes (mm. 12-16).

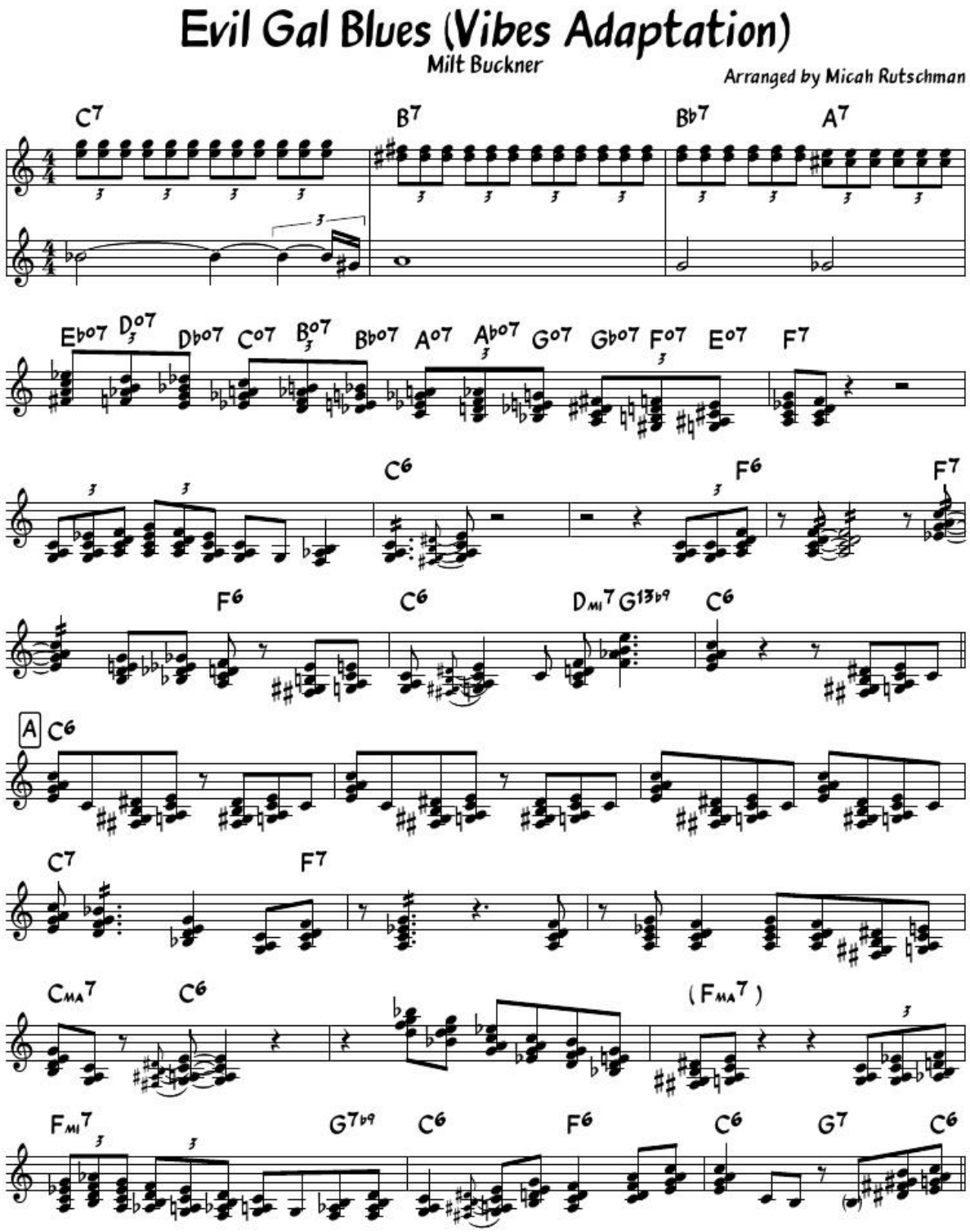


The excerpt on the previous page, taken from the beginning of Buckner's second chorus, is a good example of how Buckner incorporated single melody notes into his “locked hands” lines. In this specific excerpt, Buckner's use of C as a passing note limits the movement necessary to play the line, making it easier to play. If he were to have played chords instead of single notes, he would have had to move his hands an entire octave within an eighth note's time. As vibraphone bars are spaced farther apart than piano keys, the mallets would need to travel even farther. This makes the incorporation of single melody notes into a block chord phrase a useful technique for vibraphone practice.

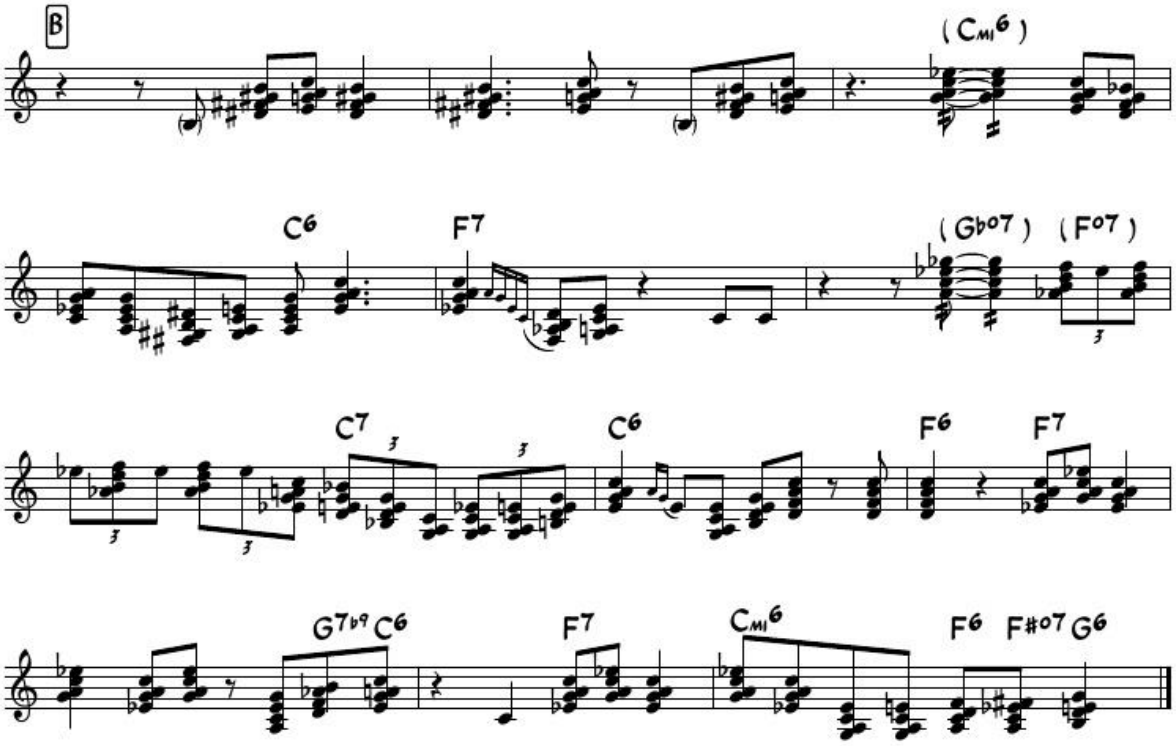
One last thought regarding Buckner's solo that translates well to the vibraphone is the use of rolls. There are a few instances throughout the solo where Buckner rolls a chord. This is a great way to vary the texture of lines, and it also works well on the vibraphone. Because of the difference in technique between piano and vibraphone performance, the notes that are being played in each hand of the roll will be different. This does not however change the overall effect of this technique in my opinion.

Milt Buckner's improvisation at the beginning of Dinah Washington's recording of *Evil Gal Blues* is a great example of the “locked hands” approach. It's simplicity and blues-oriented melodic content make it a great starting point for vibraphonists that are interested in learning and applying this approach to their own performance practice. It demonstrates how simpler melodies can be effective, and that using passing single melody notes can help make a line easier to play. Buckner's use of chordal rolls can also be applied to vibraphone, adding some variation to the overall texture. On the following pages, I have included an adaptation of Buckner's solo for the vibraphone.

Example 2: Vibes adaptation of Milt Buckner's solo on Evil Gal Blues.



Example 2 (cont.)



4.2 GEORGE SHEARING: HIS APPROACH TO THE "LOCKED HANDS" STYLE AND AN ANALYSIS OF HIS SOLO ON LIKE SOMEONE IN LOVE

Of all jazz pianists, George Shearing may be the most synonymous with the "locked hands" approach, despite Milt Buckner being credited by many as the innovator of the style. Shearing himself credits Buckner with pioneering the idea of playing entire solos using this approach. Shearing addresses this when discussing the subject in his autobiography:

> Milt Buckner pioneered the idea of playing entire solos with his hands configured the same way. He was most effective doing this on the blues chord sequence--both on piano and organ--but I realized that the style would transfer very easily to numbers that were not just a matter of simple blues.[2]

In addition to using a "locked hands" approach for soloing, Shearing also applied this sound to his group arrangements. When discussing his adaptation of Glenn Miller's arrangement of *Moonlight Serenade*, Shearing states that he gave the guitar the lowest voice, which was played by the baritone saxophone in Miller's arrangement, and he gave the vibraphone the highest voice, which was played by clarinet. Shearing then played the notes in between these two voices, which would have been played by the rest of the saxophone section.[3]

By combining the piano technique that Buckner pioneered with elements of Glenn Miller's saxophone section voicings, the "Shearing sound" was born, and he would become the definitive pianist of the "locked hands" style of playing. In this section, I will be discussing his use of the "locked hands" approach in his solo on *Like Someone in Love* from his 1962 album *Jazz Moments* released by Capitol Records.

The entire recording incorporates the "locked hands" style, including both the arrangement of the melody or head, as well as his solo. Shearing's solo is one chorus long, and he starts playing block chords in the last half of the solo. In the first 16 bars of the solo, Shearing improvises melodies in his

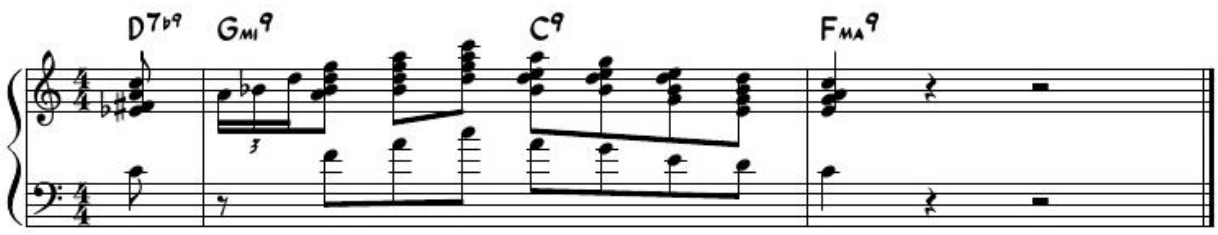
2. Shearing, George and Alyn Shipton. *Lullaby Of Birdland*. New York: Continuum, 2004.
3. Shearing, George and Alyn Shipton. *Lullaby Of Birdland*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

right hand, while his left hand provides a steady pulse of leading tones every quarter note. There are some definite similarities between Shearing's solo, and Buckner's solo in *Evil Gal Blues*, but each pianist's musical vocabulary marks some of the differences between the two examples. While Milt Buckner's solo is full of bluesy ideas that float over the chord changes, Shearing takes an approach that outlines the harmony more clearly. Shearing's mastery of the bebop language is also accentuated in his soloing, with linear ideas that are longer than what can be heard in Buckner's solo. This echoes Shearing's comments regarding Buckner's mastery of the style within a blues chord sequence, and his own desire to incorporate the style of playing into more than just blues compositions.

Some notable characteristics in Shearing's solo on *Like Someone in Love* are his use of chordal inversions, as well as passing chords. The examples below demonstrate his use of both techniques (see figs. 47-48).

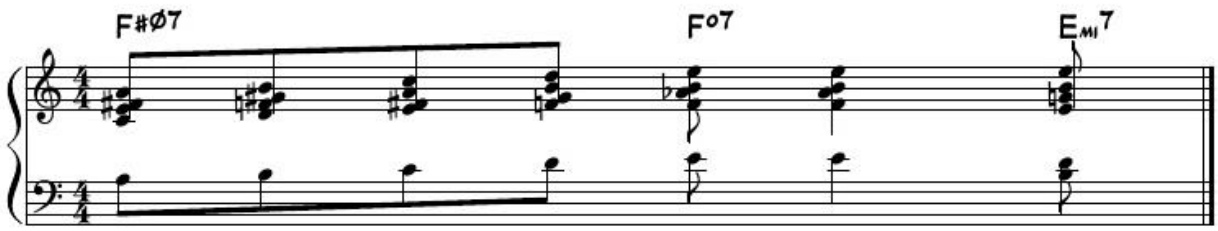
In measures 25-27, Shearing plays an ascending line, using inversions and voicings of Gmi9, C9, and Fma9 (see fig. 47). When playing an idea that is arpeggio based like this one, harmonizing the melody with chord inversions is a good approach. Also notice that he does not harmonize the first three pitches of the line. When playing faster ideas, this approach can be necessary to make the line playable. We have seen this previously in Buckner's use of passing melody notes in *Evil Gal Blues.* As we examine other “block chord” solos by other pianists, we will continue to see this approach utilized in order to make faster lines easier to play.

Fig. 47: Excerpt of Shearing's solo in Like Someone in Love using chord inversions (mm. 25-27).



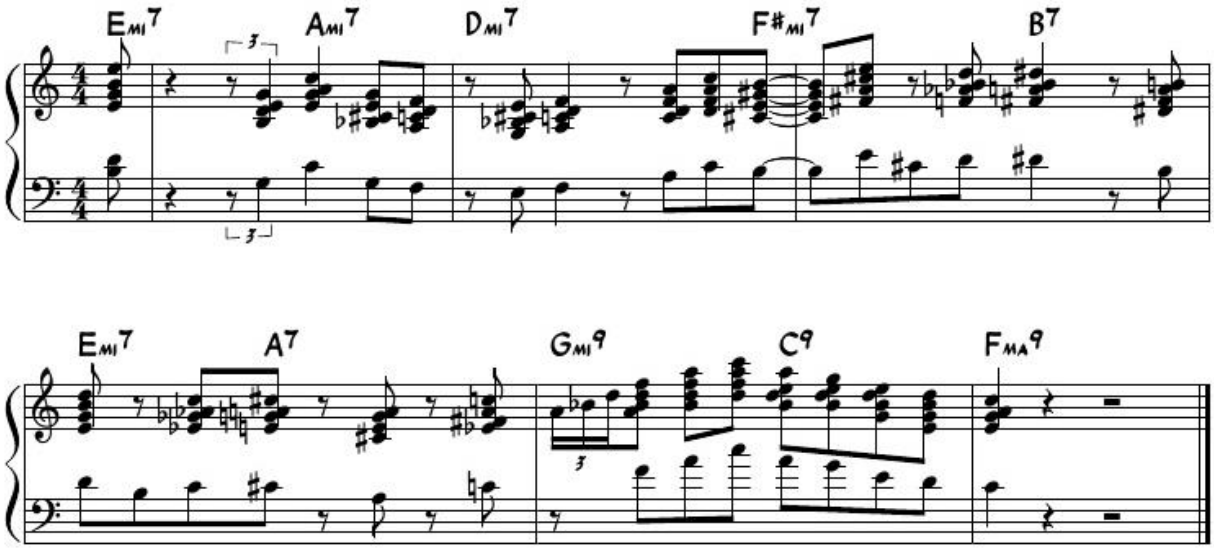
In measure 21, Shearing uses diminished 7^{ths} passing chords between voicings of F# half-diminished 7^{ths} (see fig. 48). This technique is useful when harmonizing diatonic melodic lines with stepwise movement. This allows you to outline the harmony when a chord tone is present in the melody, and the diminished passing chords function as dominant chords, which aid in strengthening the overall harmony. The harmonic movement in this approach also creates a more interesting sound than if you were to just use diatonic chord voicings for the entire line.

Fig. 48: Excerpt of Shearing's solo in Like Someone in Love using passing diminished chords (mm. 21).



Shearing's talent for navigating through harmony while playing in the “locked hands” style is very apparent in *Like Someone in Love*, since the harmonic motion in the tune is fairly fast, frequently changing every two beats. In order to successfully maneuver through the composition, special attention needs to be given to outlining the fast-changing chordal structure. In fig. 49, Shearing combines techniques to navigate the fast chord progression. In the first two measures in the example, Shearing uses passing diminished 7th chords to enclose voicings of Dmi7. In the ii-V progressions starting in measure three, he uses a combination of chord inversions and passing diminished 7th chords.

Fig. 49: Shearing uses a combination of techniques to navigate the chord progression.

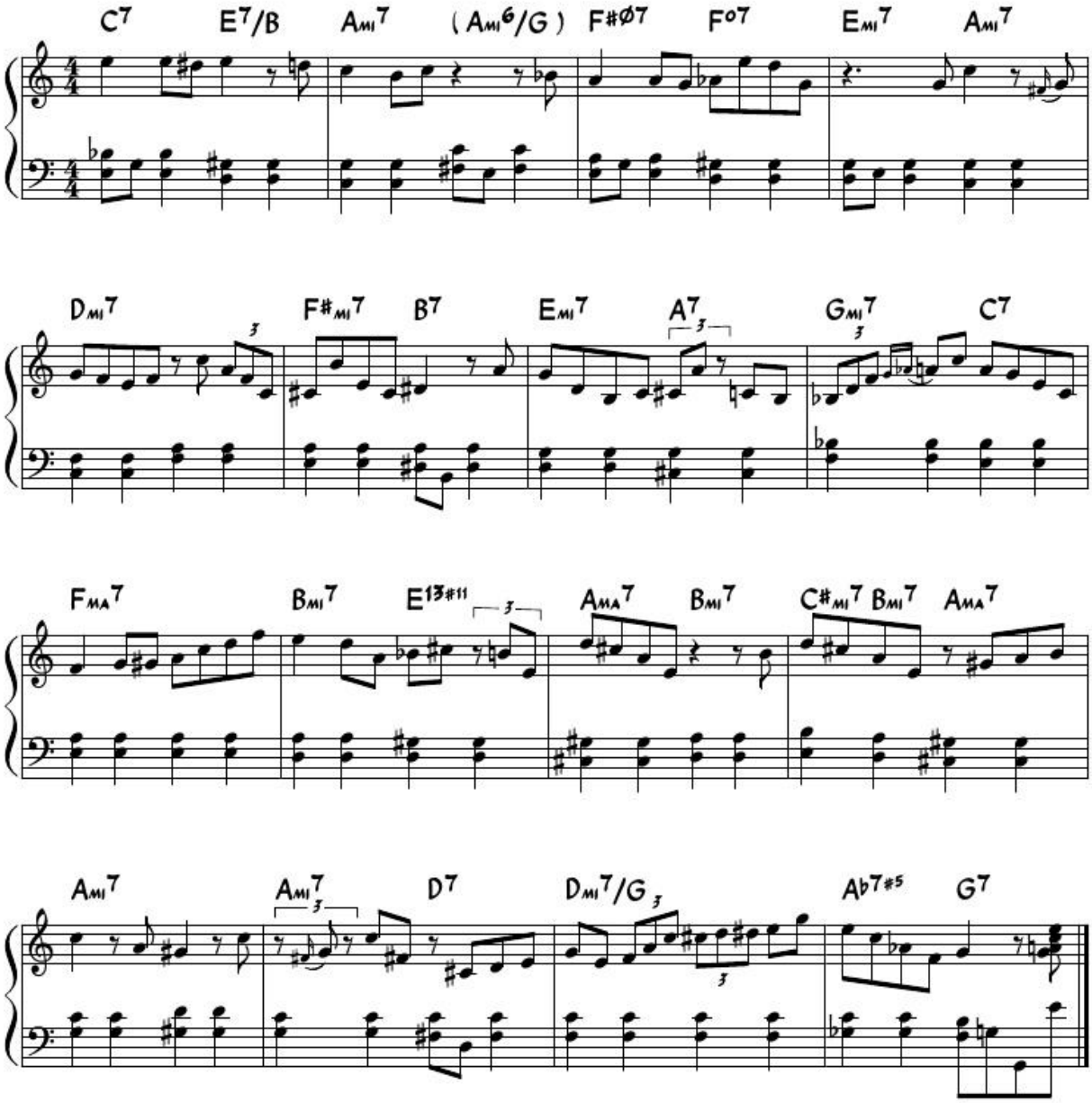


In the example above, Shearing also plays the full melody in his left hand, instead of his right hand. He also does not harmonize every melody note. He harmonizes notes that are crucial to outlining the chord progression, while leaving less important notes unharmonized. Specifically, he plays chords where the harmony changes.

The technique of leaving some melody notes unharmonized is a concept that applies well to vibraphone when playing in a “block chord” style, as playing faster chordal lines can be challenging on the instrument. Shearing's approach of playing the full melody in the left hand, or lower octave is also an interesting technique. On the vibraphone, as we are only capable of playing four notes simultaneously (when using four-mallet technique), we have to choose which note to leave out when adopting the “locked hands” style. Previously, I have discussed leaving the lower octave of the melodic line out. By doing this, the melody can be heard in the highest voice. Shearing has pointed us in the direction of another option however. We can also leave the highest note out and lead the melodic line in the lowest pitch. This has a very different sound and gives us another technique that we can draw from when creating our own harmonizations.

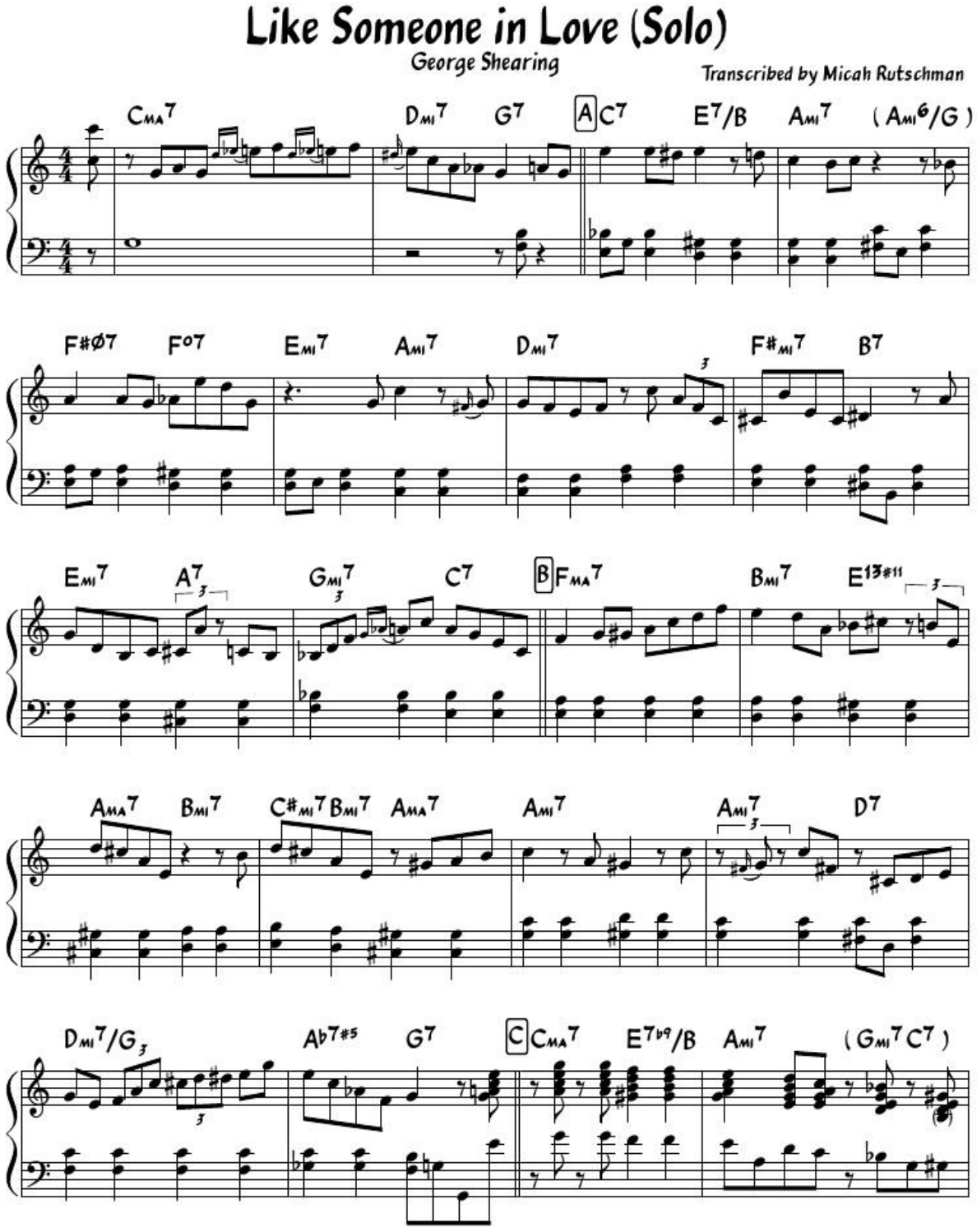
There is another technique that Shearing uses in this solo example, and though it is not a "block chord" technique specifically, I do think that it is worth mentioning, as it can also be applied to vibraphone. In measures 3-18 of Shearing's solo, he plays two leading tones in his left hand, while playing a melody in his right hand (see fig. 50).

Fig. 50: Shearing plays two leading tones in his left hand while playing a melody in his right hand (mm. 3-18).

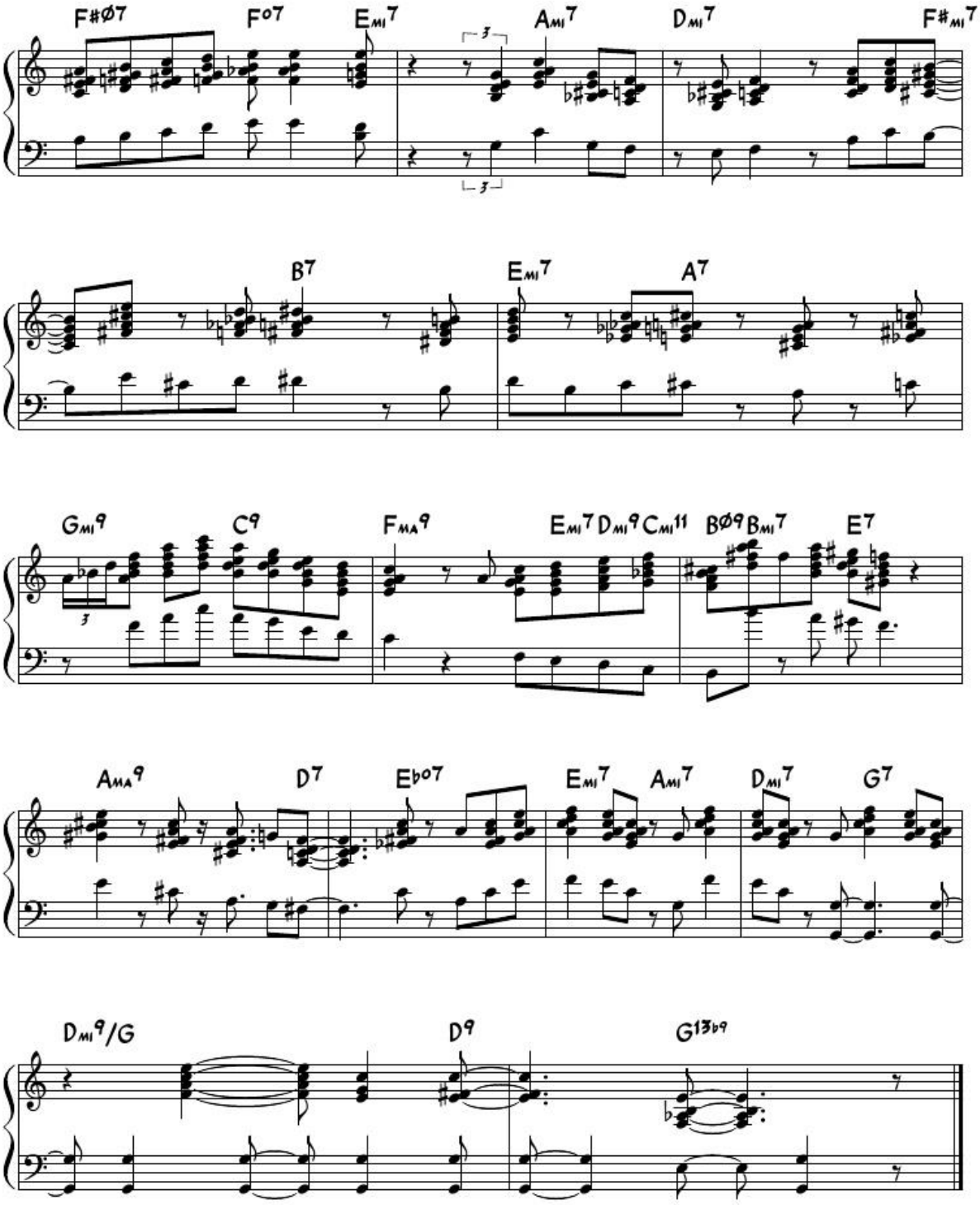


Playing two leading tones in the left hand as accompaniment while playing a melodic line above can be done on the vibraphone with ease. This technique can be used as another way to add contrast to chordal playing on vibraphone. In the following pages, I have included a full transcription of George Shearing's solo on *Like Someone in Love*.

Example 3: Transcription of George Shearing's solo on Like Someone in Love.



Example 3 (cont.)



4.2.1 VIBRAPHONE ADAPTATION OF GEORGE SHEARING'S SOLO ON LIKE SOMEONE IN LOVE

While Milt Buckner's solo on *Evil Gal Blues* is a good starting point when adapting the "locked hands" approach to the vibraphone, Shearing's solo on *Like Someone in Love* is a good place to expand on the application of the concept. Perhaps the most notable aspects of this solo are Shearing's incorporation of bebop vocabulary, as well as his use of passing diminished chords. Although Buckner does incorporate some passing diminished chords, this is a concept that is explored in more depth by Shearing in his solo on *Like Someone in Love.* Buckner also does not use bebop vocabulary in his solo. These aspects of Shearing's playing can be seen in measures 21-23. Note that for this excerpt, adapting the example for vibraphone is as simple as removing the lowest voice (see figs. 51-52).

Fig. 51: Shearing's use of passing diminished chords and bebop vocabulary in measures 21-23 of Like Someone in Love.

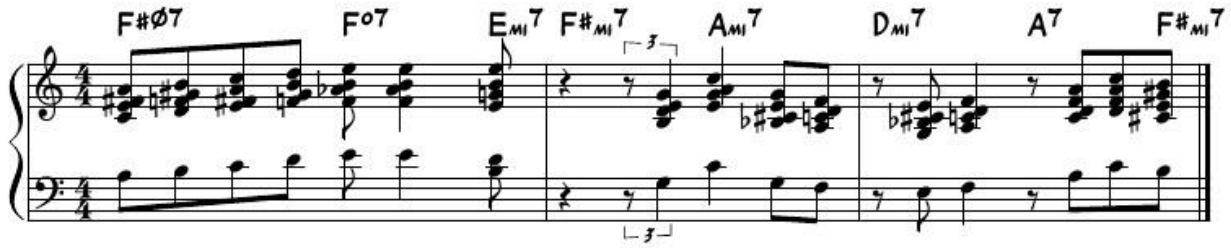
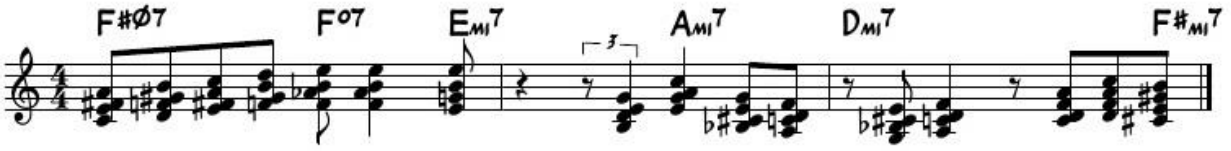


Fig. 52: Vibraphone adaptation of measure 21-23 from Shearing's solo on Like Someone in Love.



As mentioned earlier, in measures 3-18, Shearing's plays two-note chord voicings on every quarter note, while playing a melody in his right hand. Although this is not a block chord technique, it is a useful approach that can help add variety to one's playing. Notice that the notes that Shearing is playing in his left hand are the leading tones, or 3^{rds} and 7^{ths} for the most part. Although some chord tones are not being played, by using leading tones, the harmony is implied (see mm. 7-10 in figs. 53-54).

Fig. 53: Shearing playing leading tones in his left hand on every quarter note in measures 7-10.

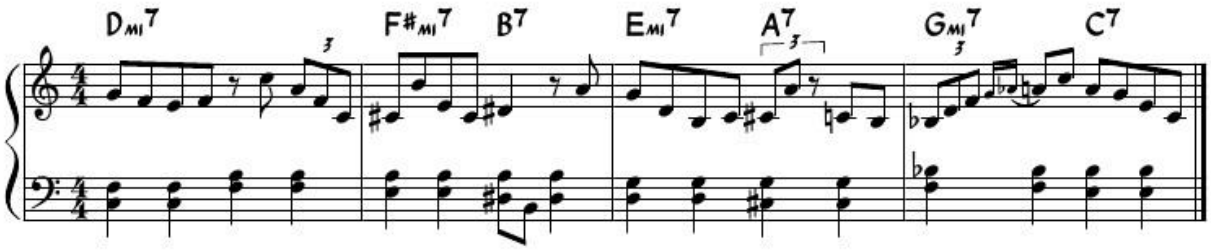
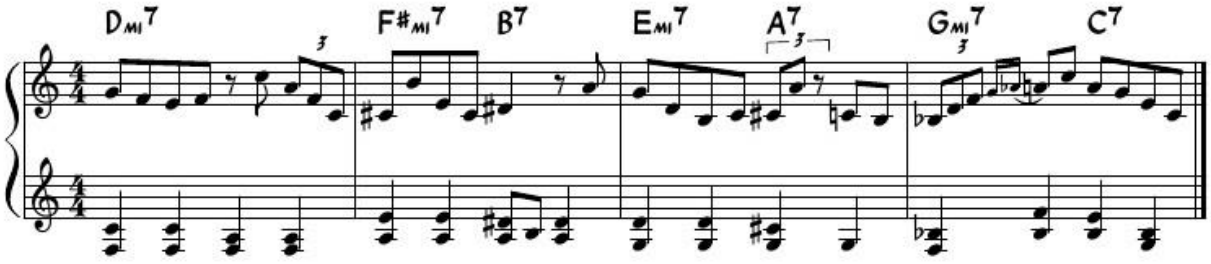


Fig. 54: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 7-10.

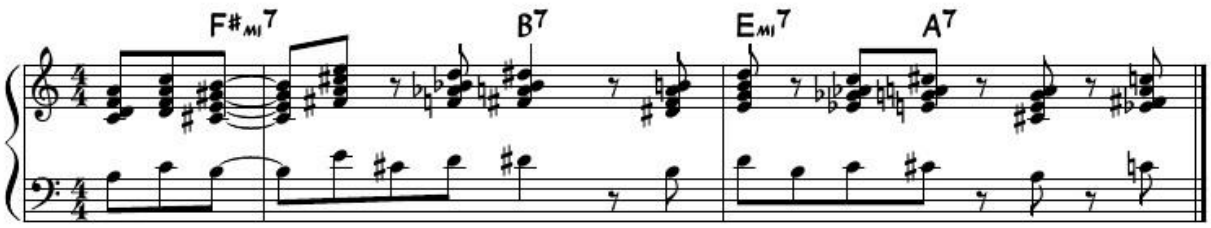


There are some challenges to adapting measures 7-10 to the vibraphone. In parts where the accompaniment drops below the standard vibraphone range, I invert the leading tones. Another concern with this technique is that it requires the melodies to be played with just the left hand for a majority of the time. Although possible on the vibraphone, it is a challenge, and it certainly cannot be done at the

same speed as on the piano. It therefore would need to be slowed down. Additionally, the grace note figure on beat two of measure 10 is challenging to play on the vibraphone, so if the example were to be played at Shearing's tempo, the grace notes would most likely need to be left out (see fig. 54).

As we have observed from Buckner's solo on *Evil Gal Blues*, when adapting a “locked hands” approach to the vibraphone, omitting the lowest voice is typically the best option. There are circumstances where this can become problematic. Like Buckner's solo, Shearing also uses passing single melody notes in his lines. Note that Shearing plays many of these passing notes in the lowest voice and omitting these voices would disrupt the melody (see mm. 23-25 in fig. 55).

Fig. 55: Shearing's “locked hands” approach, with passing single melody notes in the lowest voice in measures 23-25.



To alleviate this issue, I have voiced the passing single melody notes an octave higher, so that they are parallel with the highest voice (see fig. 56). Alternatively, you could omit the top voice, leaving the melodic line in the lowest voice. With this option, because the melody is only played in the lowest voice, it should be played louder than the other voices so that it can be heard clearly (see fig. 57). A full adaptation of Shearing's solo on *Like Someone in Love* is included on the following pages.

Fig. 56: Shearing's "locked hands" approach in measures 23-25 adapted for vibraphone, with passing single melody notes voiced an octave higher.

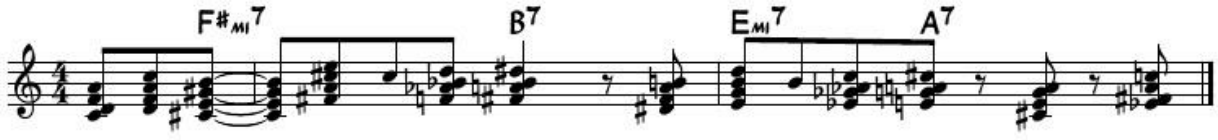
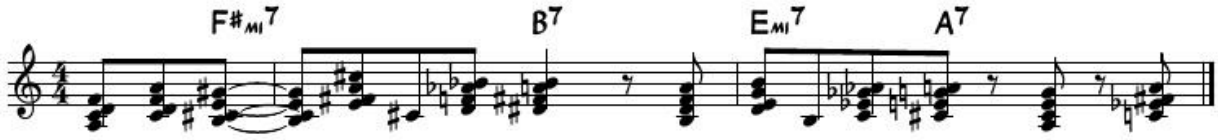
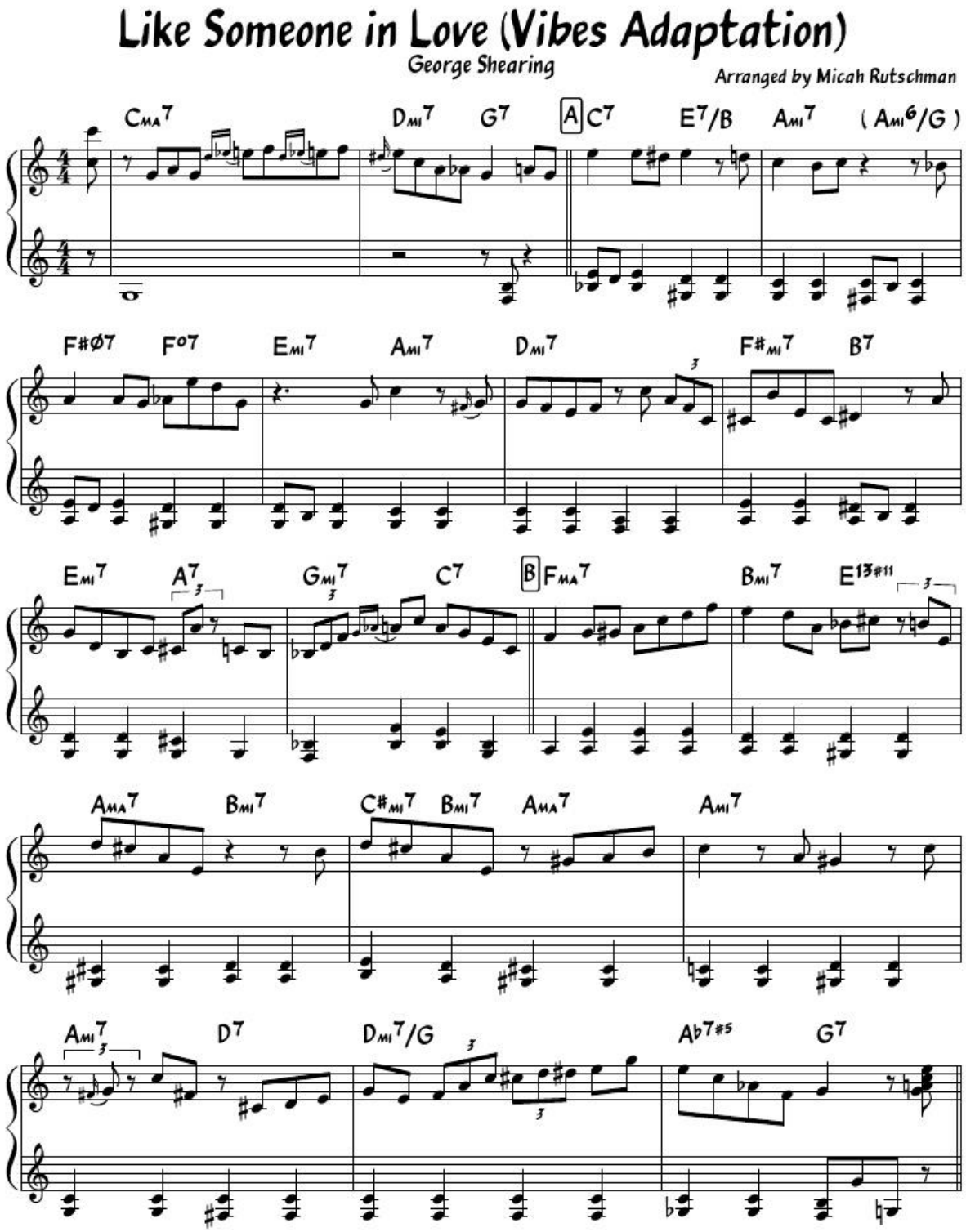


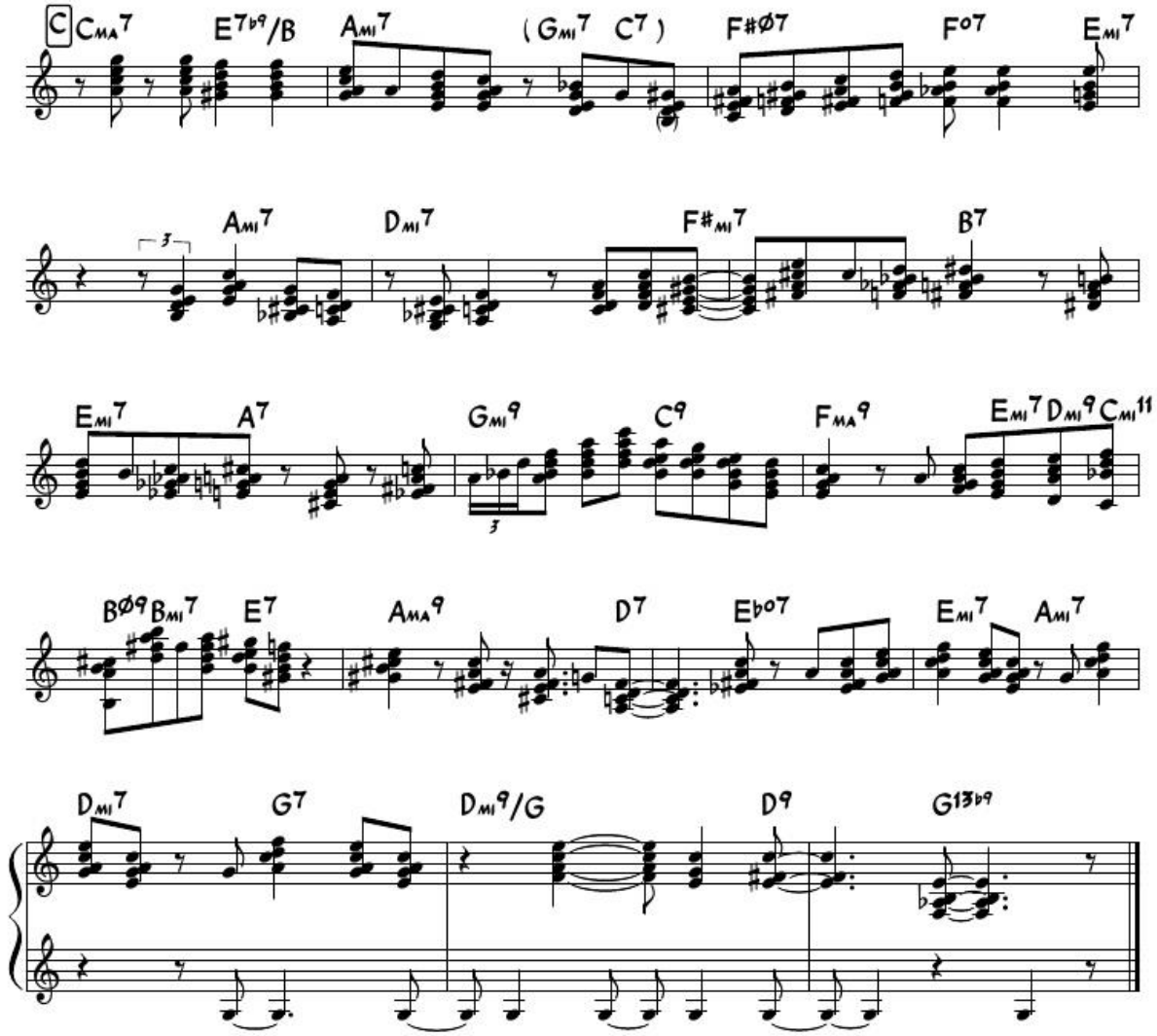
Fig. 57: Shearing's "locked hands" approach in measures 23-25 adapted for vibraphone, with passing single melody notes voiced in the lower octave.



Example 4: Vibes adaptation of George Shearing's solo on Like Someone in Love.



Example 4 (cont.)



4.3 OSCAR PETERSON: A VIRTUOSIC APPROACH TO CHORDAL SOLOING WITH AN ANALYSIS OF HIS SOLO ON DREAM OF YOU

Oscar Peterson is known for his mastery of the piano, as well as his virtuosic approach to soloing. This section will cover his block chord playing and looks specifically at his solo on *Dream of You*.

Dream of You is the second track from Oscar Peterson and Milt Jackson's 1972 album *Reunion Blues* released by MPS Records. The tune is a ballad written by Benny Carter, and Peterson's solo on it exemplifies his approach to block chord playing. Although Peterson's approach is similar to the Milt Buckner and George Shearing's examples that we have already looked at, there are some notable differences. Although Peterson utilizes the "locked hands" approach to block chord playing, unlike Buckner's examples previously discussed, Peterson does not play "locked hands" throughout the entire solo. Rather, he uses it as one tool in his arsenal for creating and building his solo. In some sections of his solo, he incorporates right hand melodies with left hand accompaniment (see fig. 58). He also plays two note ideas, or double stops in his right hand in some sections of his solo (see fig. 59).

Fig. 58: Example of Peterson's playing that incorporates right hand melodies with left hand accompaniment (mm. 21-24).

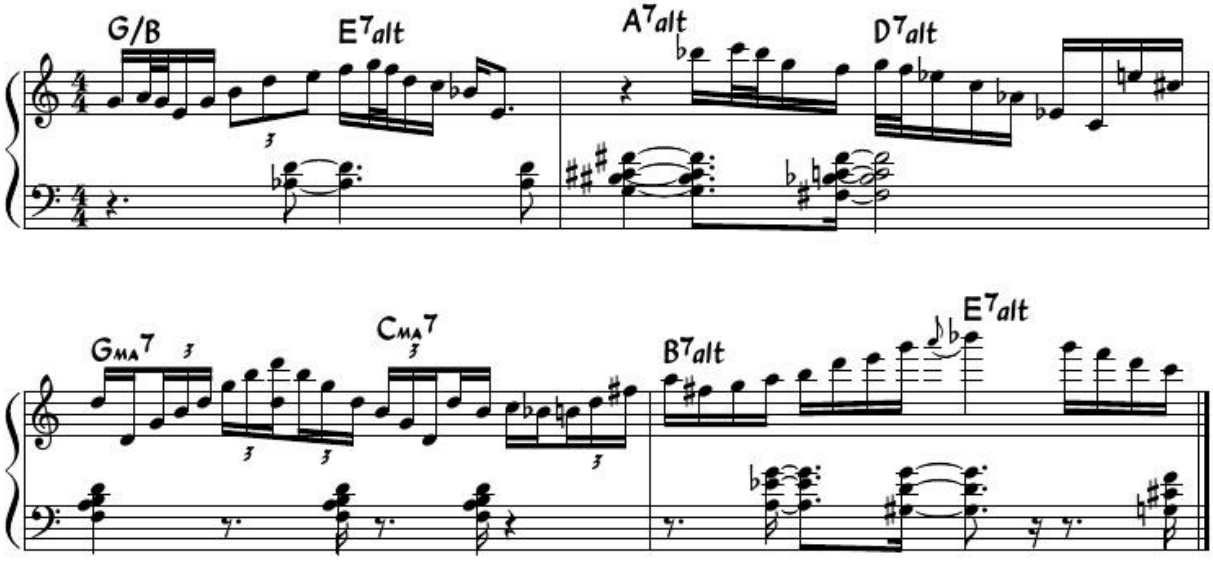
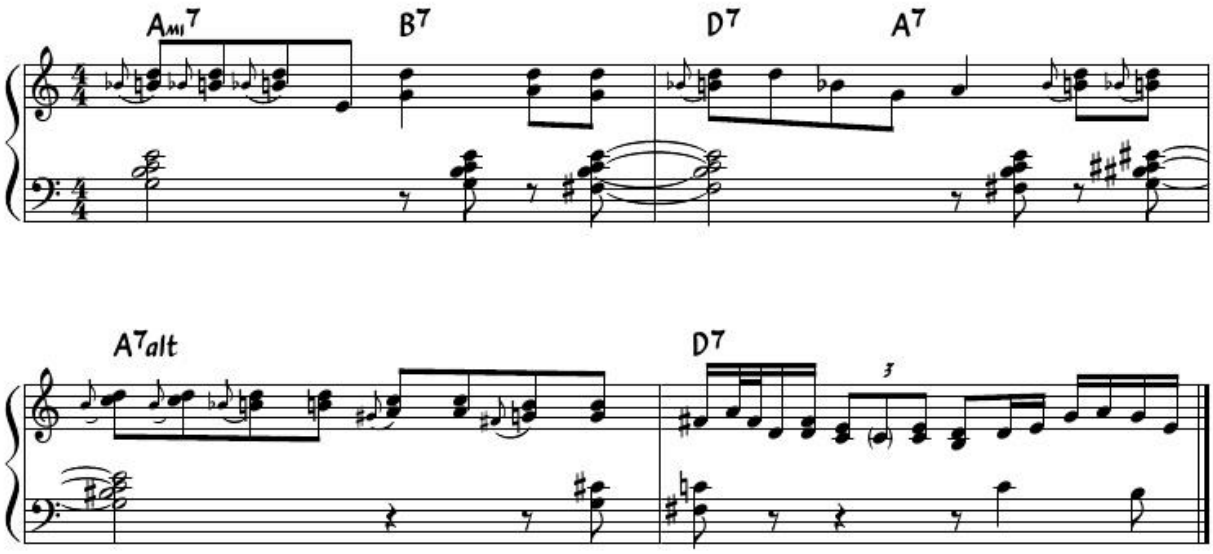


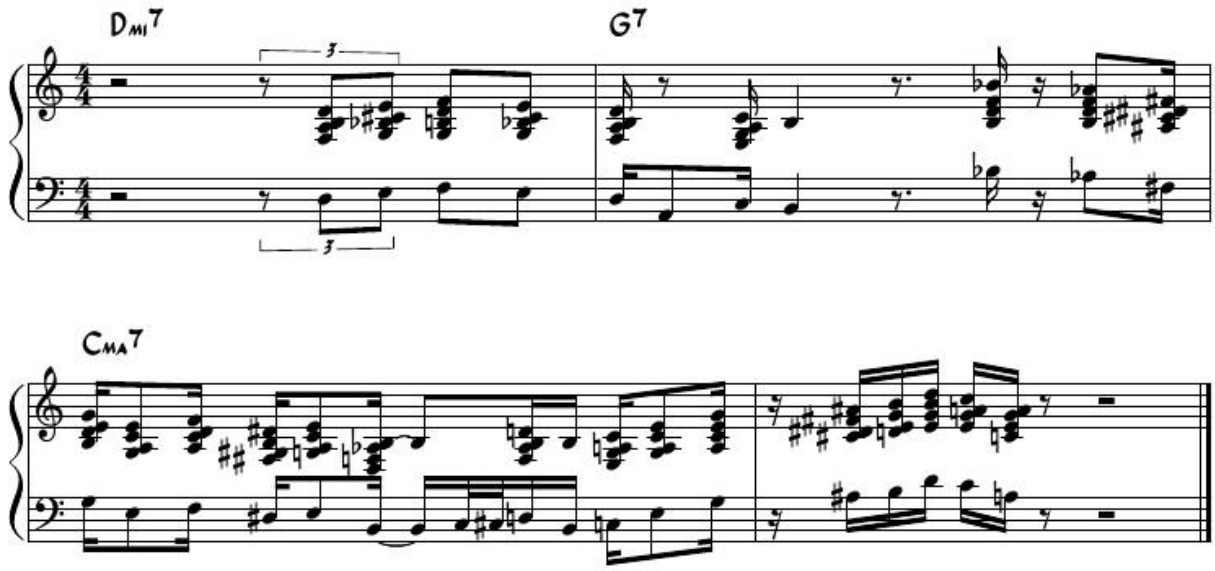
Fig. 59: Example of Peterson's playing that incorporates two note ideas, or double stops in his right hand (mm. 17-20).



The variety of approaches used by Peterson is very effective in building a great solo, and we can learn from how he combines different techniques. The form of *Dream of You* is AABA, and Peterson improvises over an entire chorus of the form, beginning at the bridge instead of at the beginning of the form. He starts his solo with "locked hands", utilizing this approach in measures 1-12 of his solo. In measures 13-26, he creates some contrast by playing with a more standard pianistic approach, where his right hand provides melodic content, and his left hand provides chordal accompaniment. His use of double stops in his right hand starting in measure 12 gives a very bluesy sound to the solo. He then ends his solo with "locked hands", starting in measure 27.

Because of the slow tempo of the tune, Peterson is able to incorporate syncopated double-time rhythms into his solo, adding another level of complexity and interest to his solo. The use of rhythmic material this complex is not something that we have seen in Buckner's or Shearing's solos discussed previously (see fig. 60).

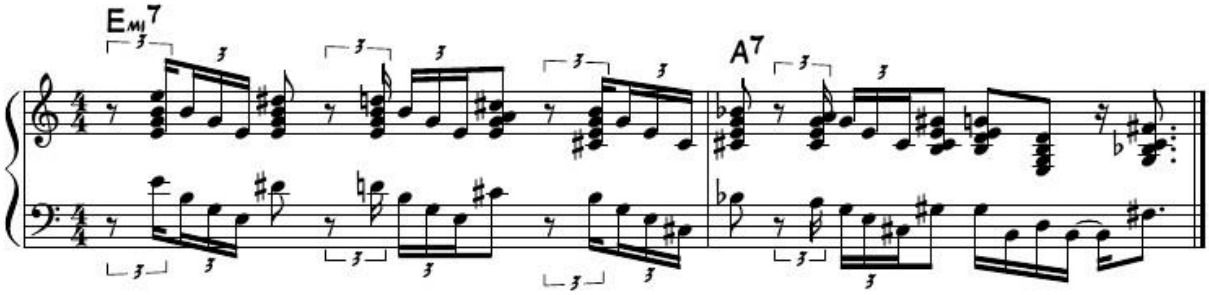
Fig. 60: Example of Peterson's use of syncopated rhythms in measures 1-4 of his solo.



Some of the techniques that we saw in Buckner and Shearing's solos are also present in the excerpt shown in fig. 60. In the first measure, for example, Peterson uses passing diminished chords in his line. Peterson also uses chromaticism, leading into a C6 chord from a B6 chord from the pickup to measure 3. He does the same with an F#6 and G6 chord in the 4th measure.

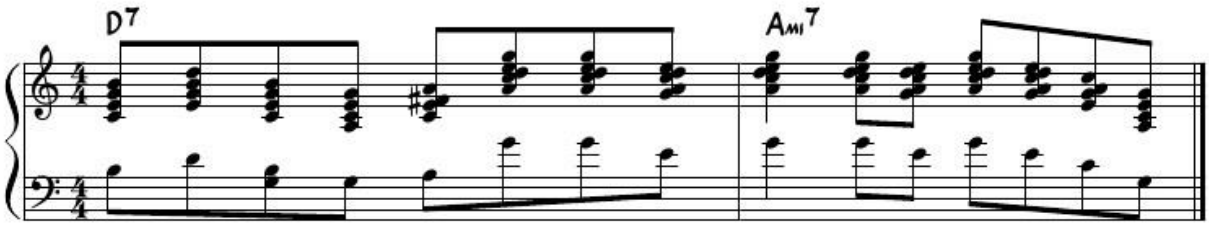
Peterson is fully capable of harmonizing every single one of his melodic notes, and for the most part he does. There are some moments however where he plays block chord ideas and leaves some notes unharmonized. An example of this can be seen in measures 5-6 of his solo (see fig. 61). Peterson alternates between playing block chords and melody notes in octaves. In measure 6, he also plays a couple of passing melody notes in his left hand, which we have seen in both Buckner's and Shearing's playing. This approach helps facilitate the execution of fast ideas, where harmonizing every melody note would be difficult.

Fig. 61: Peterson's combination of melody notes in octaves with the "locked hands" approach.



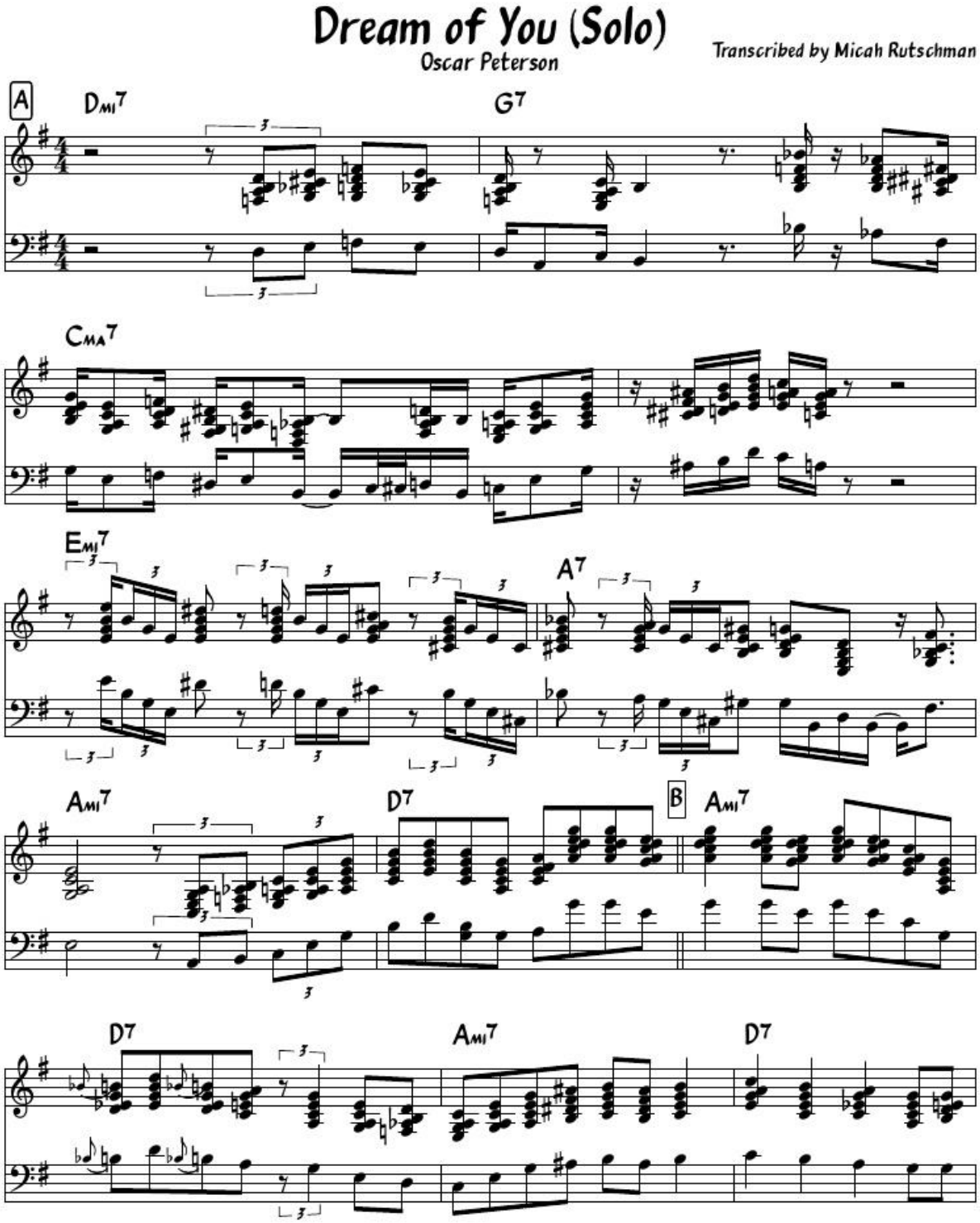
Another aspect of this solo that stands out is Peterson's use of six note voicings in measures 8-9. By adding an additional note to the typical "locked hands" voicing, he creates a fuller sound (see fig. 62).

Fig. 62: Peterson adds a 6th voice to "locked hands" voicings to create a fuller sound (mm. 8-9).

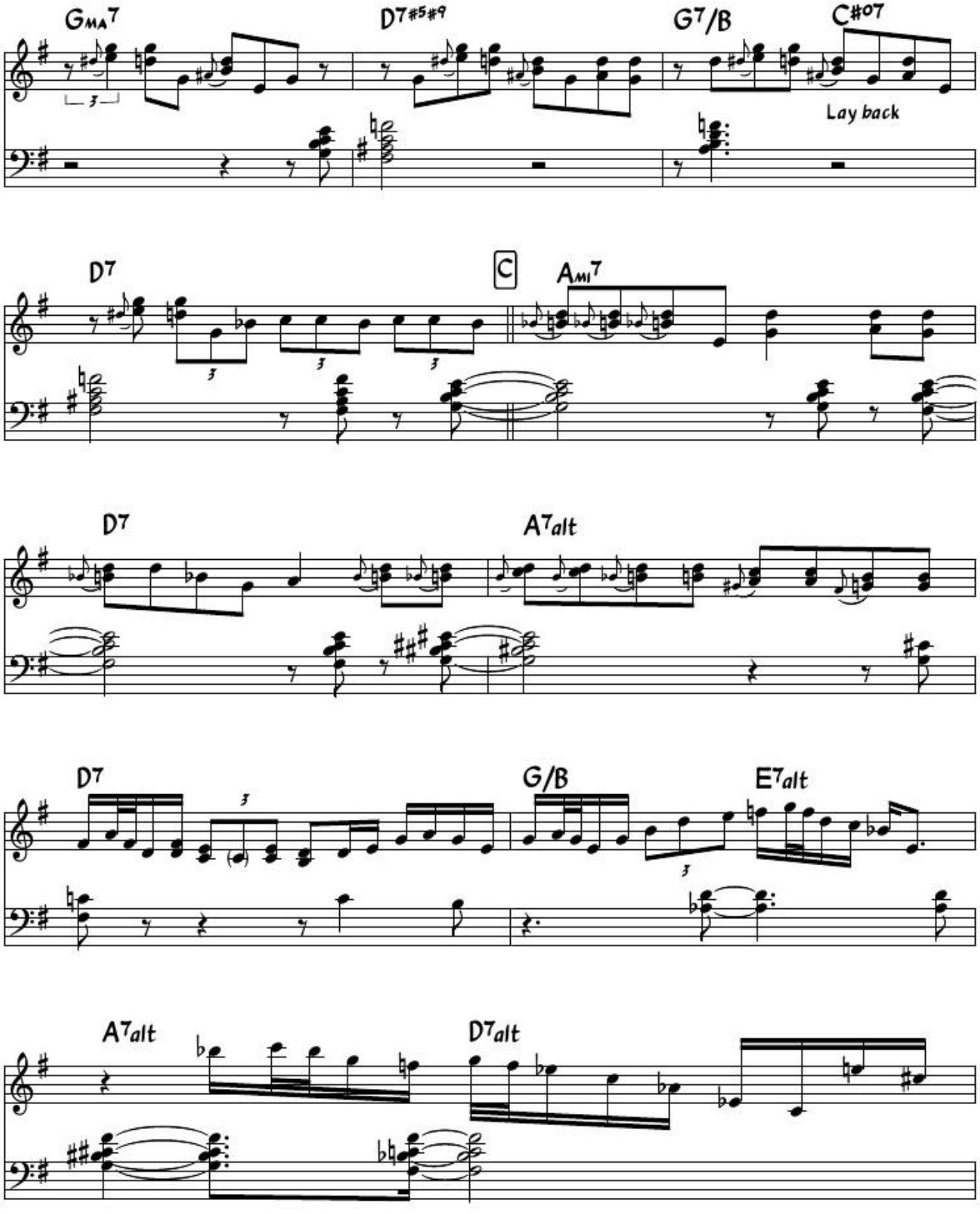


Oscar Peterson's use of the "locked hands" approach stands out from the two previous solos that we have looked at so far. Peterson uses the approach as one of many tools in order to build a solo. He weaves between block chord passages and virtuosic single melody lines in a very organic way. I have included a full transcription of his solo on *Dream of You* on the following pages.

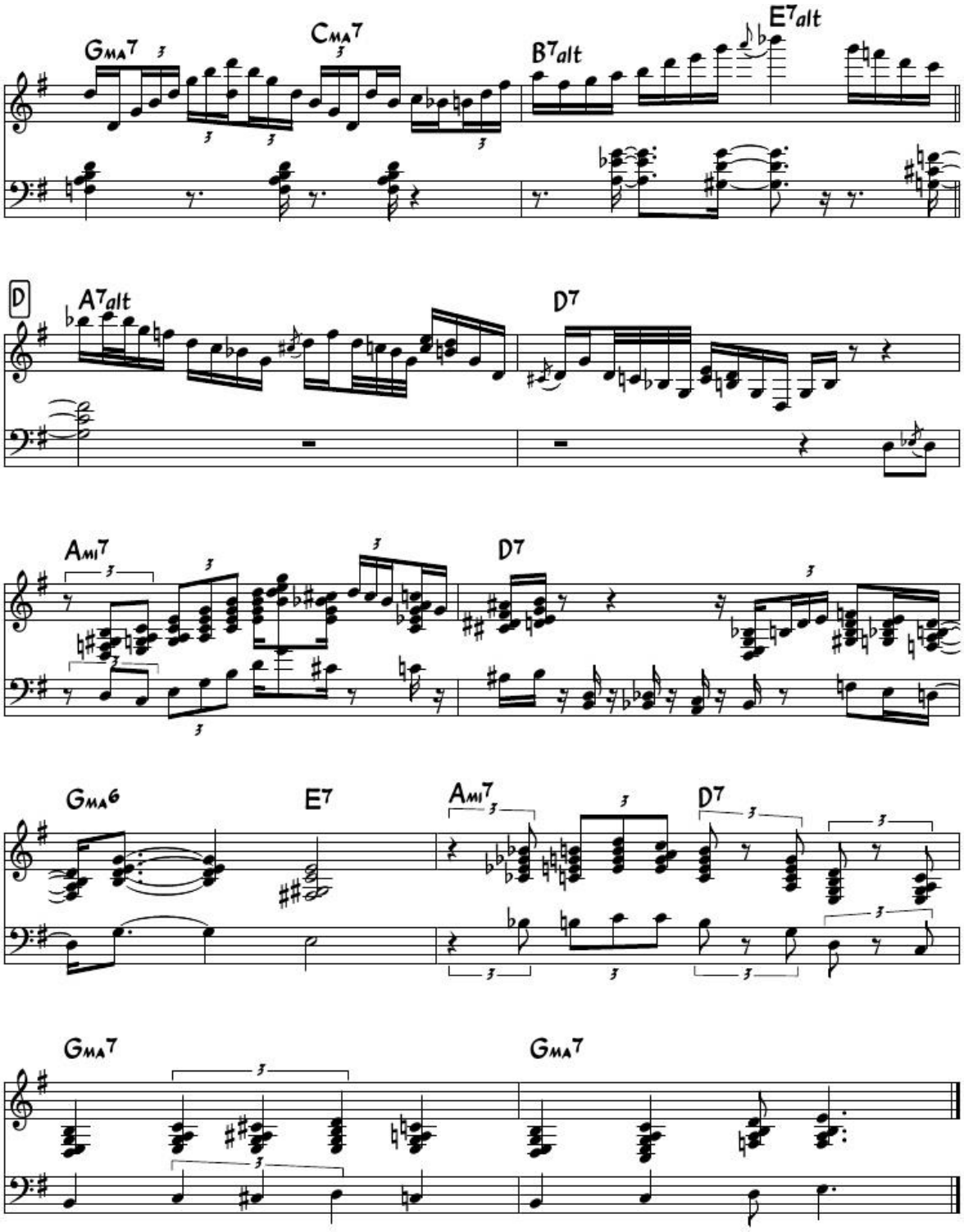
Example 5: Transcription of Oscar Peterson's solo on Dream of You.



Example 5 (cont.)



Example 5 (cont.)



4.3.1 VIBRAPHONE ADAPTION OF OSCAR PETERSON'S SOLO ON DREAM OF YOU

Adapting this solo to the vibraphone, we run into some of the same dilemmas that we have dealt with in other solos. In certain sections, lines and voices need to be transposed in order to fit the range of the vibraphone. Peterson's fast phrases can be challenging to execute as well, meaning that the solo would need to be played slower on the vibraphone.

Looking at measures 1-4 again, although Peterson is playing sixteenth notes, the excerpt translates surprisingly well to the vibraphone. While playing a continuous phrase of sixteenth notes using blocks chords would be difficult on the vibraphone, the syncopated rhythms played by Peterson in this section are more playable. Peterson uses "locked hands" voicings throughout, with occasional passing notes in his left hand (see fig. 63). When adapting this excerpt to the vibraphone, omitting the lowest voice is the best option. Additionally, the passing notes that Peterson plays in his left hand need to be voiced an octave higher to maintain the melodic thread (see fig. 64).

Fig. 63: Peterson's use of "locked hands" voicings with syncopated rhythms in measures 1-4 of Dream *of You.*

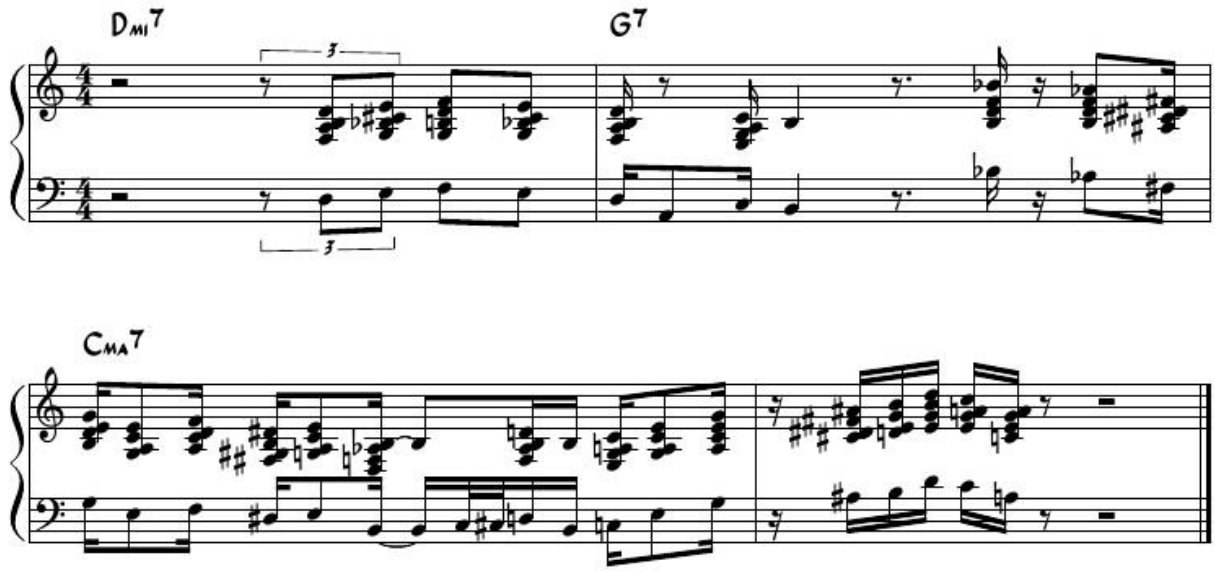
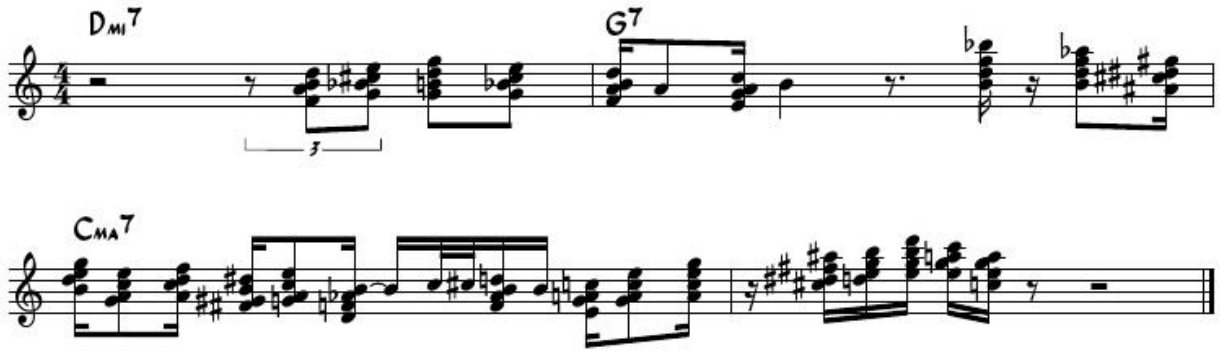


Fig. 64: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 1-4 from Dream of You.



A unique aspect in Peterson's solo is his inclusion of octave melodies in his block chord lines. A good example of this can be seen in measures 5-6 (see fig. 65). Although playing these octaves on the vibraphone is possible, it would be very challenging to play at a faster tempo. In order to make the execution of these ideas easier, I have omitted the lower octave note. Also note that I transposed the phrase up an octave so that it fits the standard range of the vibraphone (see fig. 66).

Fig. 65: Peterson mixes octave melodies into his block chord line in measure 5-6.

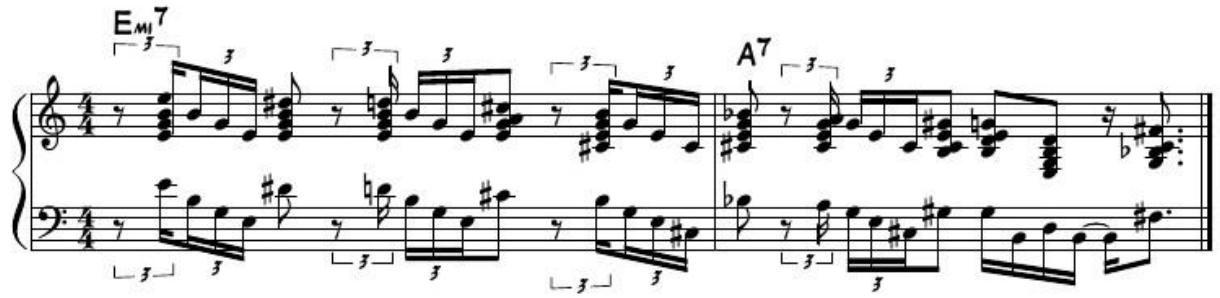
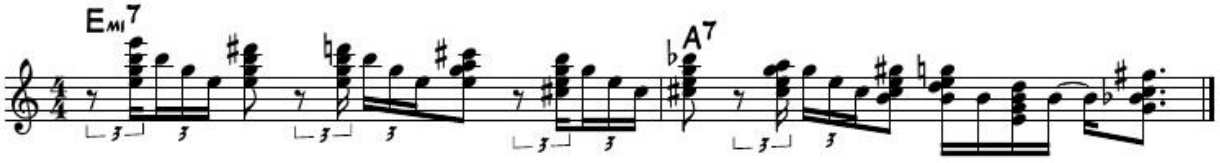


Fig.66: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 5-6.



In measures 8-9 where Peterson plays six note voicings, two notes must be omitted in order to adapt the phrase to the vibraphone (see fig. 67). Below, I illustrate two voicing options. In the first example the lowest two voices are omitted. This preserves some of the “crunch” of the closely voiced pitches (see fig. 68). In the second example the lowest voice, as well as one of the middle voices has been omitted. This option retains more important chord tones at the cost of the “crunch” in Peterson's original voicing (see fig. 69). I have included a full vibraphone adaptation of the transcription on the following pages.

Fig. 67: Peterson's use of six note chords in measures 8-9.

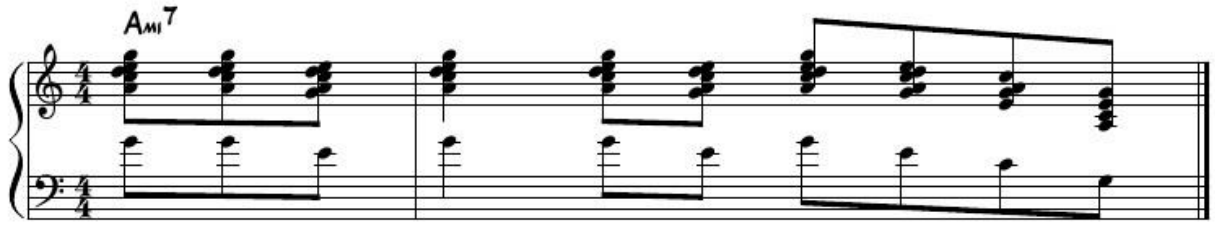
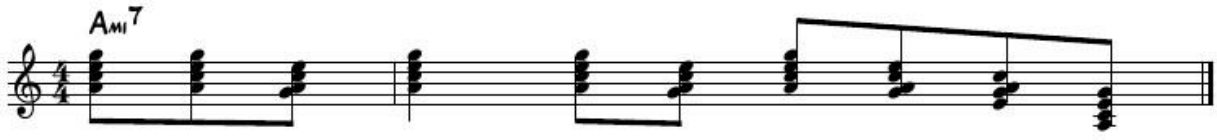
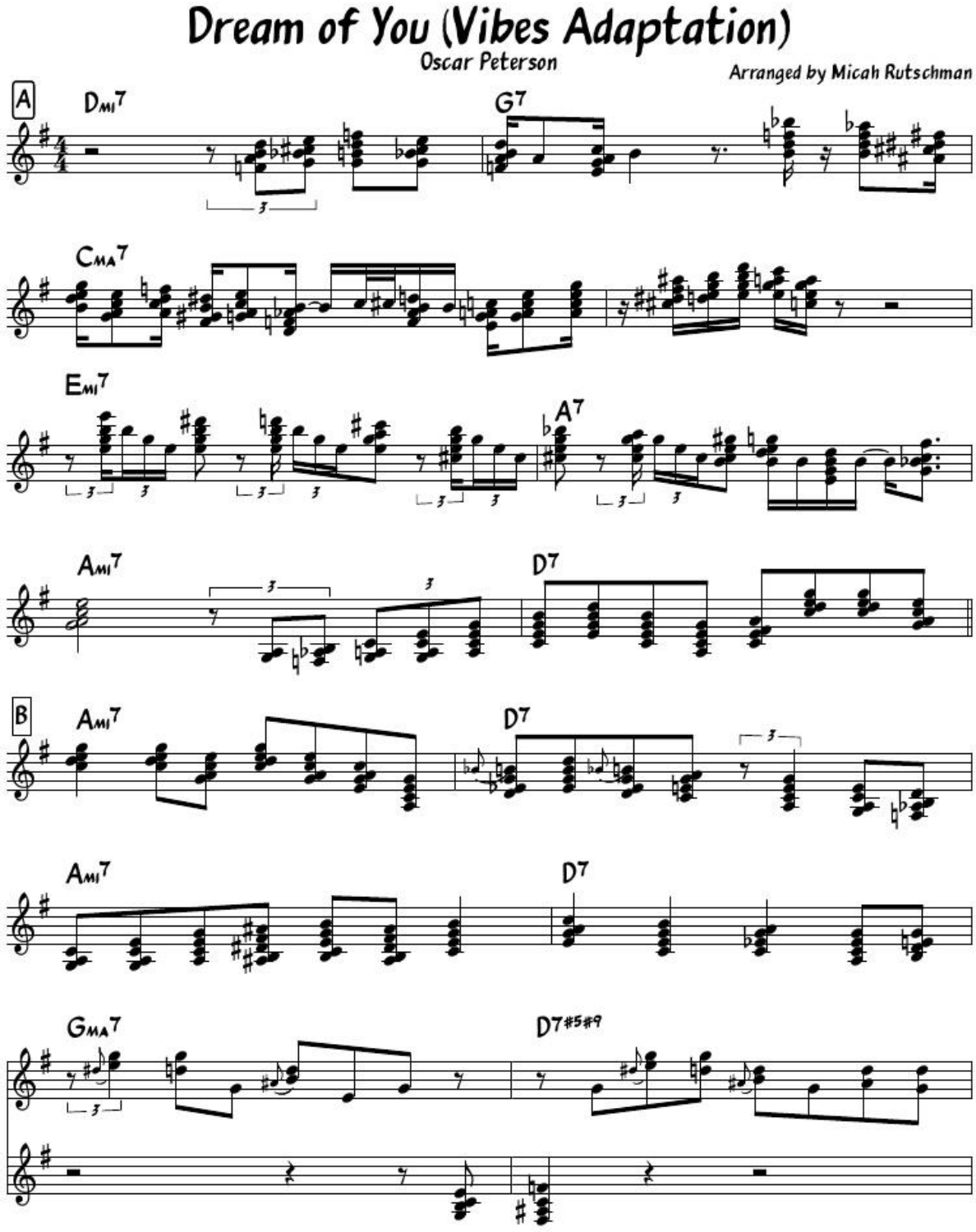


Fig. 68: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 8-9.

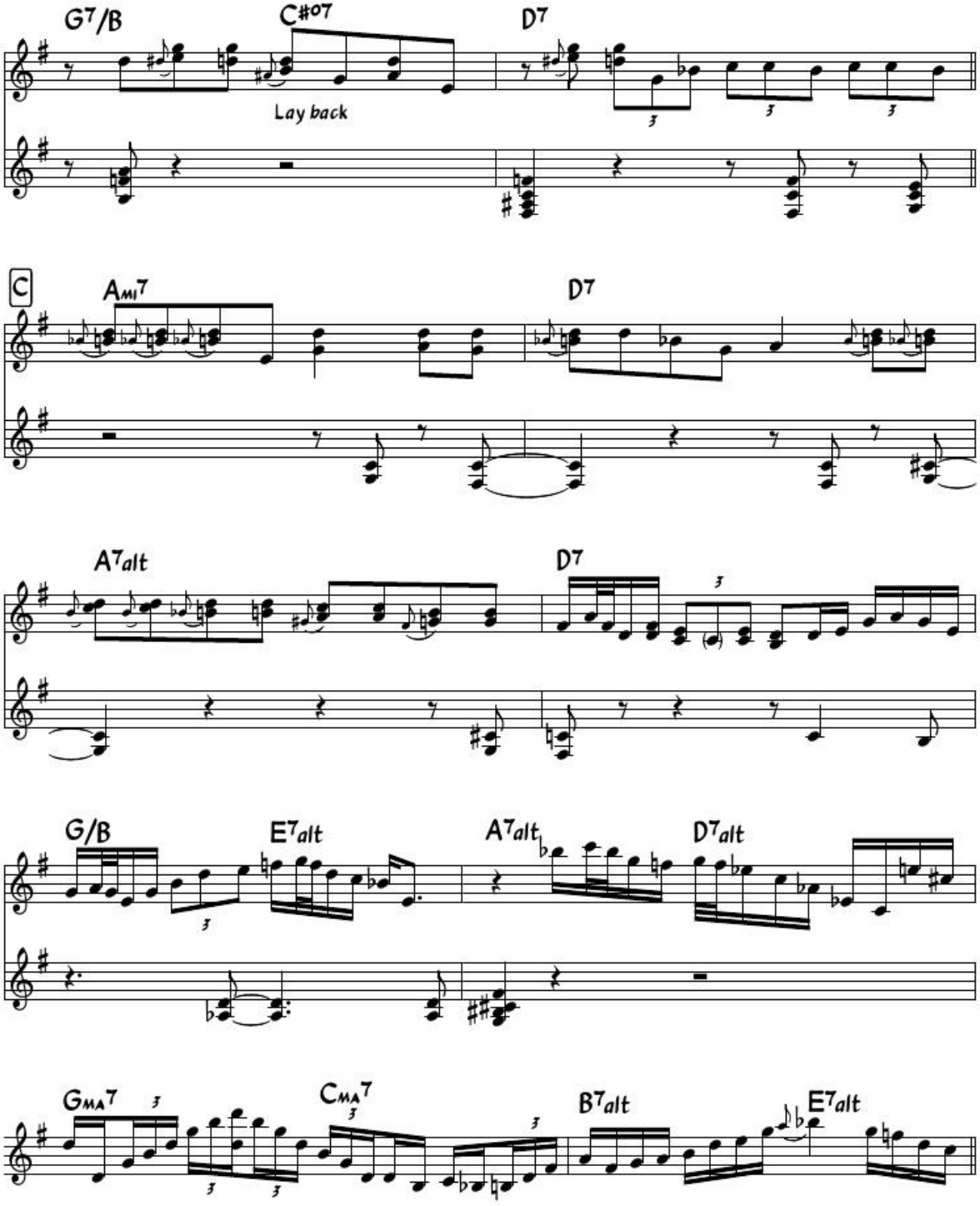
Fig. 69: Alternate voicing option for vibraphone adaptation of measures 8-9.



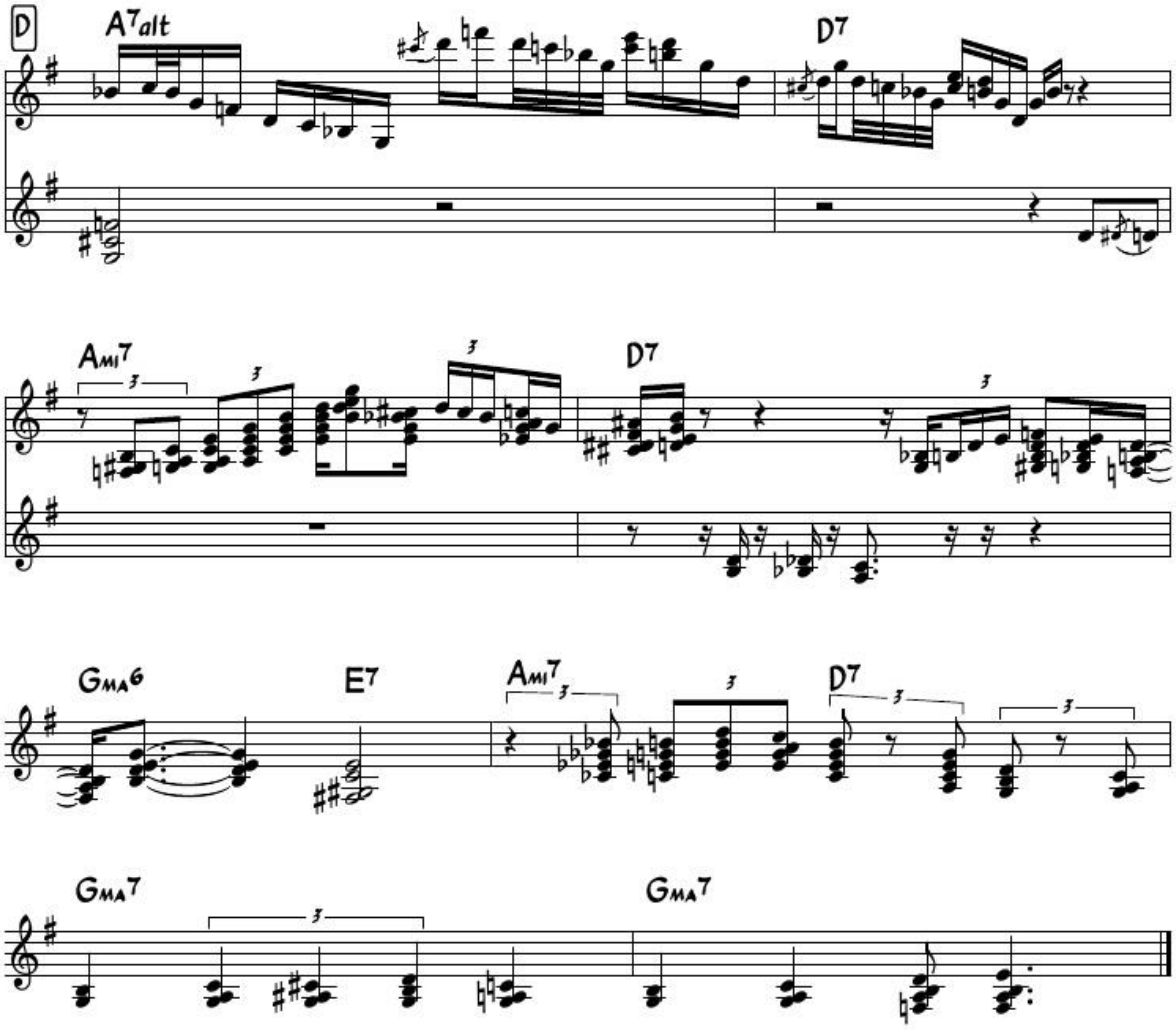
Example 6: Vibes adaptation of Oscar Peterson's solo on Dream of You.



Example 6 (cont.)



Example 6 (cont.)



4.4 RED GARLAND: AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE "LOCKED HANDS" APPROACH TO BLOCK CHORD PLAYING WITH AN ANALYSIS OF HIS SOLO ON TRANEING IN

Red Garland's approach to block chord playing is significantly different from the other examples that we have discussed so far. While Shearing and Peterson adopted the "lock-hands" approach first utilized by Milt Buckner, Red Garland used a different technique altogether. In his left hand, Garland would play a closed position voicing, while his right hand would play octaves, often adding a note a perfect fourth below the highest voice. While his left hand would remain on the same voicing, his right hand would move to play the melody. Red apparently came across this specific approach on accident. Mentioned in the liner notes of Garland's record *A Garland of Red*, while he was practicing one day, out of frustration, he "dropped his hands on the keyboard in despair and they fell into place to produce a sound he instantly liked".[4]

Red Garland's solo on *Traneing In* is a great example of his use of this technique. Of note is that Garland is not playing in a block chord style throughout the whole solo, but rather uses it as a tool for building his solo. Although his solo is three choruses long, Garland only begins using block chords in his 3rd chorus, at which point his solo is entirely made up of block chords until the end. In this way, his block chord playing is being used to build intensity and reach a climax in his solo.

There are three notable characteristics of this playing style that makes it stand out. With the "locked hands" style, both hands move in the same direction when playing a phrase. As mentioned earlier, with Garland's approach, the left hand typically remains on one voicing, while the right hand moves freely (see figs. 70-71).

4. Gitler, Ira. liner notes for *A Garland of Red*. The Red Garland Trio. Prestige PRLP 7064, 1957. LP.

Fig. 70: Garland's block chord style. Note his left hand remains on one voicing while his right hand plays an ascending passage (mm. 113-114).

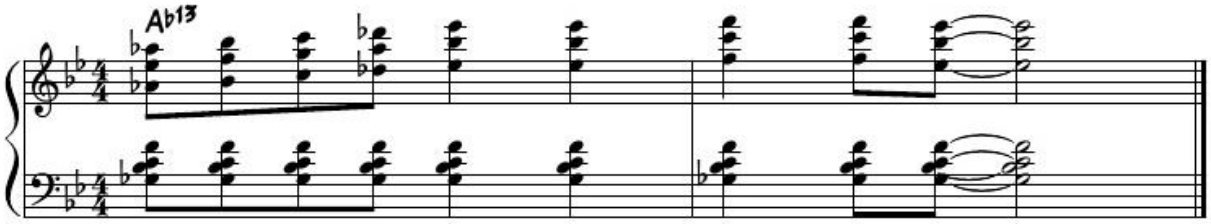
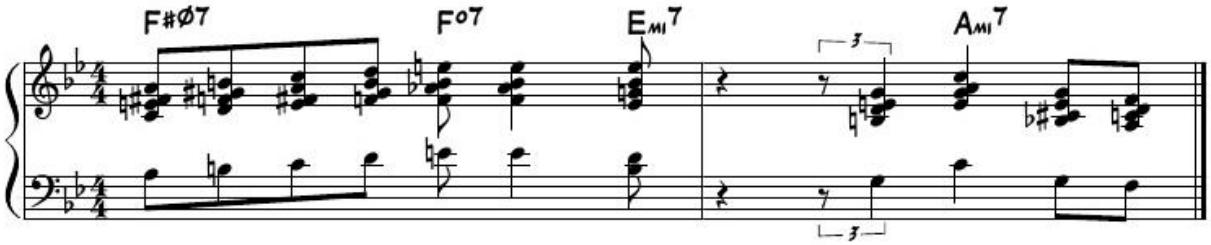
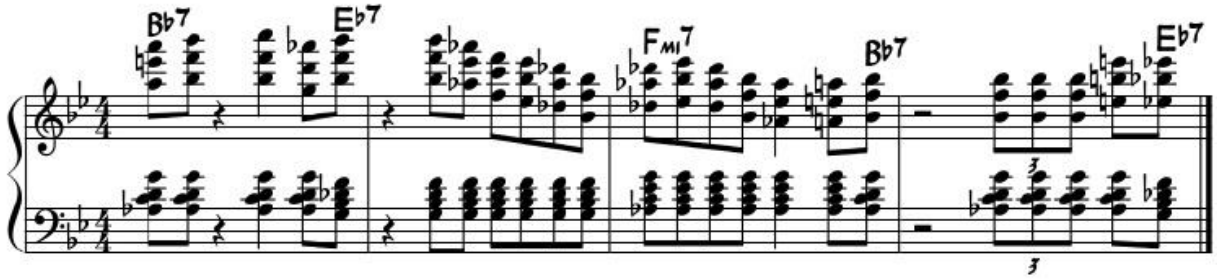


Fig. 71: George Shearing's use of the "locked hands" style in measures 21-22 of Like Someone in Love. Unlike Garland's approach, both hands move in the same direction. Also note that all of the voicings fit within an octave.

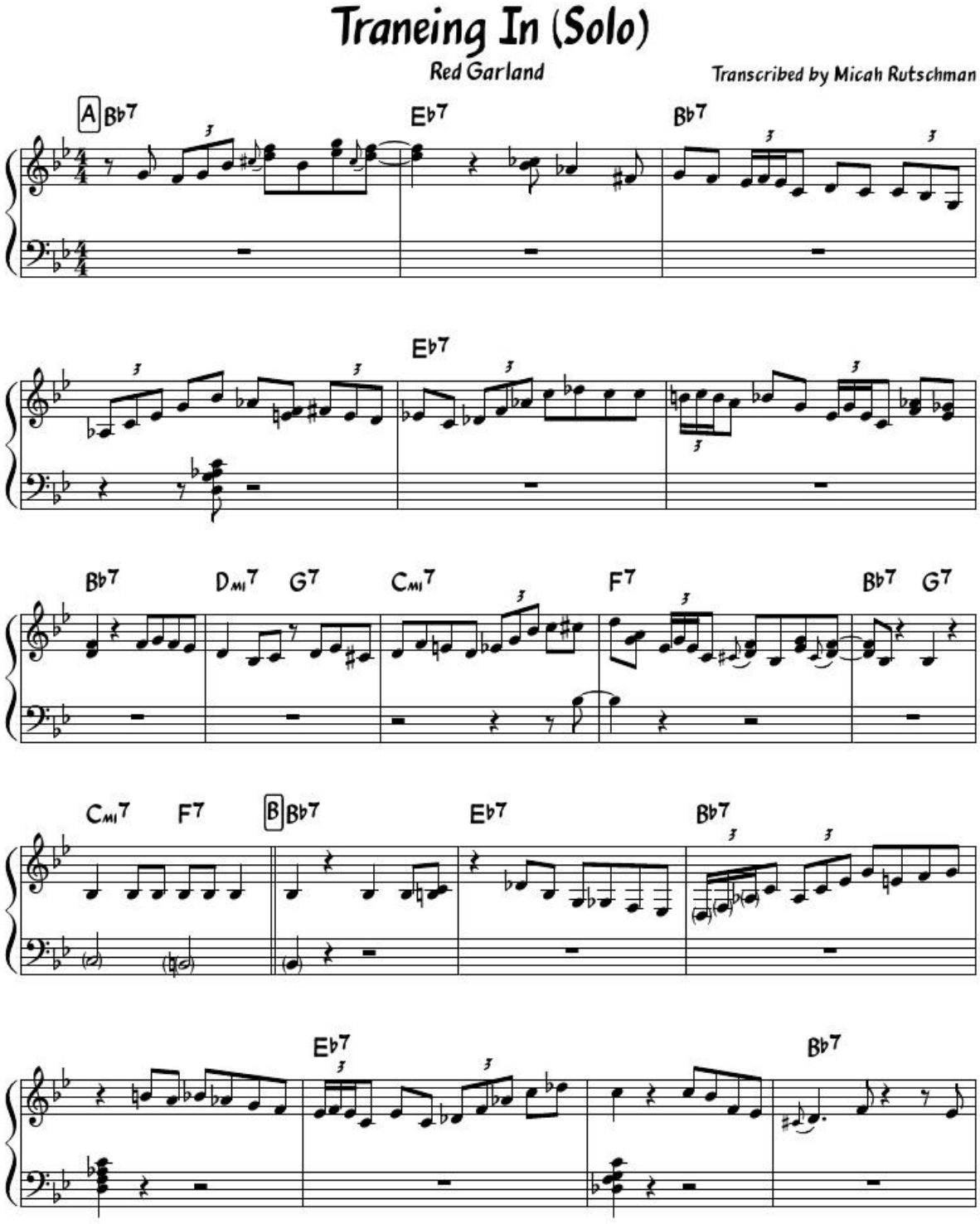


Another important aspect of Garland's block chord style is that his voicings cover a much larger range than the "locked hands" style. While the "locked hands" style typically uses voicings within the range of one octave, Garland's approach can span two or more octaves. Additionally, while the "locked hands" style typically utilizes five-note voicings, Garland's technique often uses seven-note voicings. Also note that the right hand occasionally plays non-chord tones with this technique. In fig. 72, the beginning of the phrase begins with As and an E voiced in the right hand, while a Bb13 voicing is played in the left hand. While E could be considered a #11 of Bb13, A is a non-chord tone. I have included a full transcription of Garland's solo from *Traneing In* on the following pages.

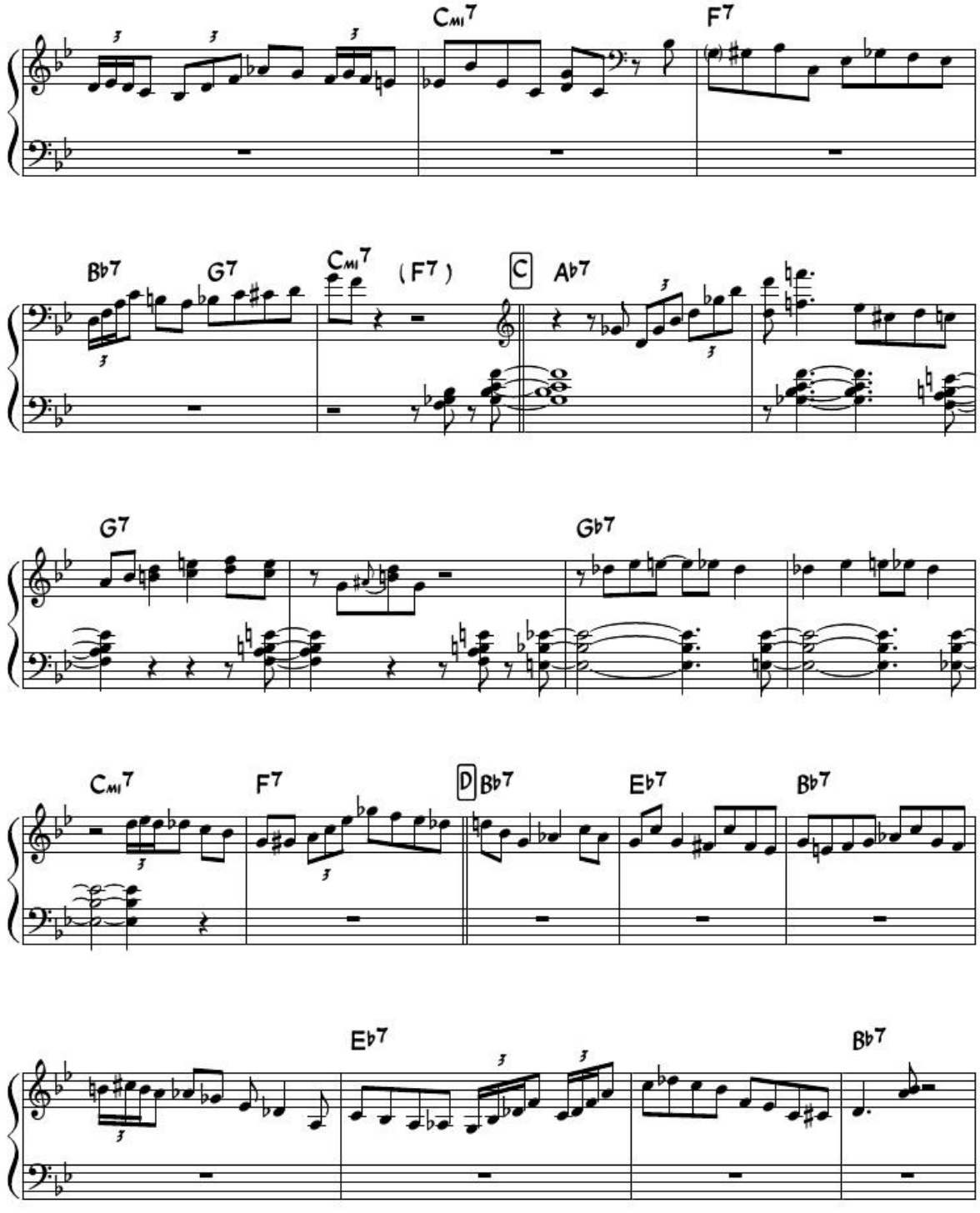
Fig. 72: Garland's block chord style, using seven-note voicings that span more than three octaves at certain points. Note the use of non-chord tones in his right hand (mm. 100-104).



Example 7: Transcription of Red Garland's solo on Traneing In.



Example 7 (cont.)



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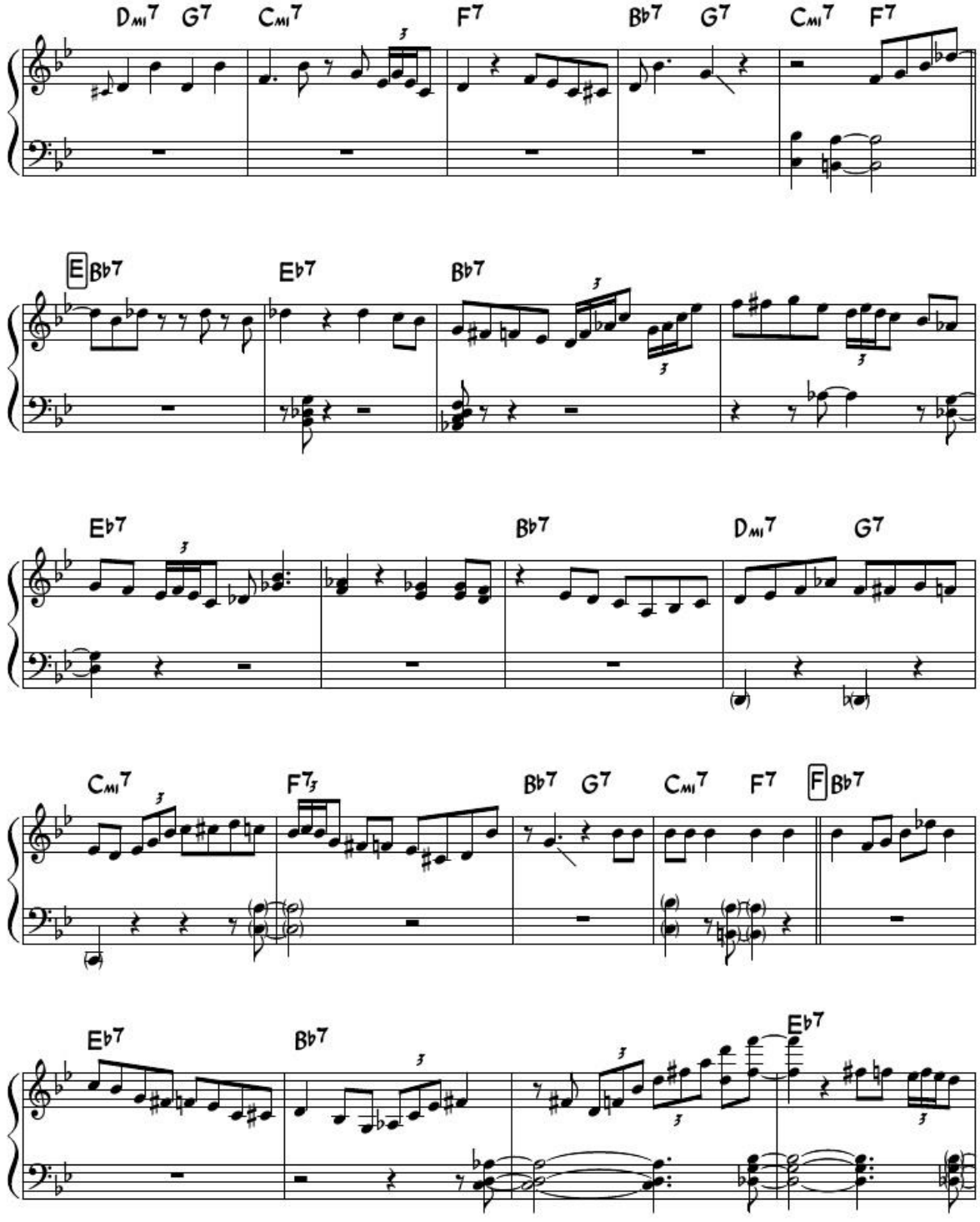

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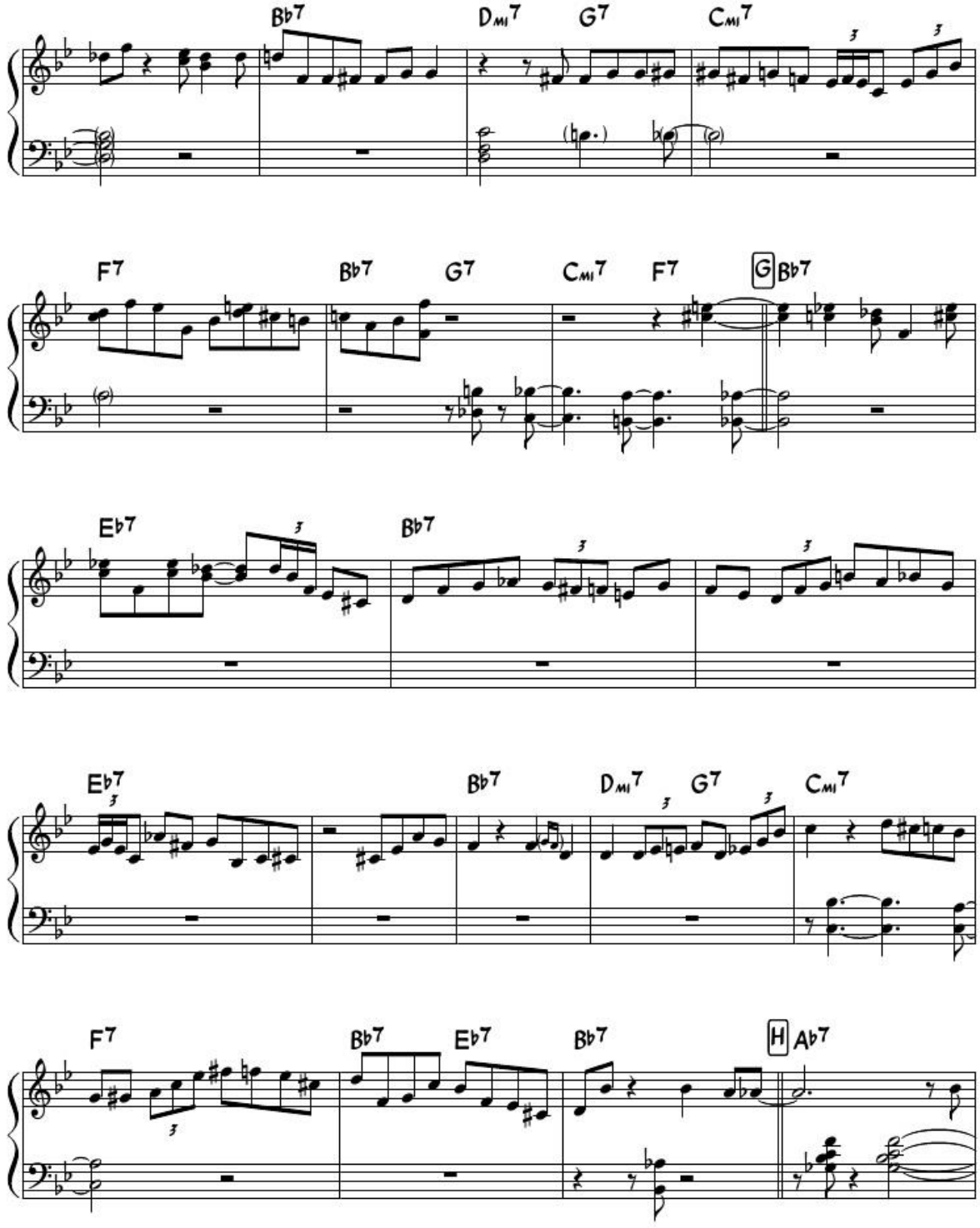

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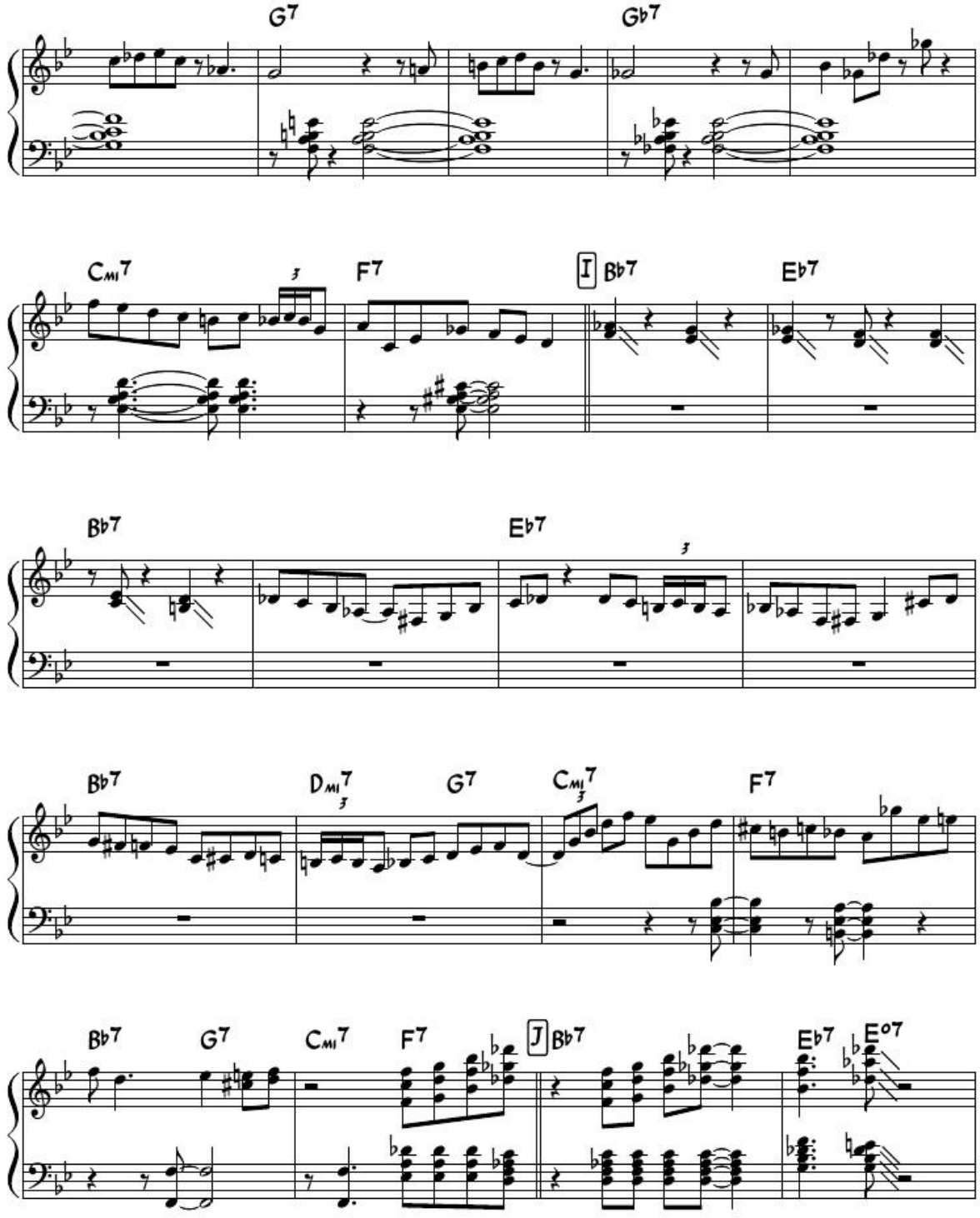

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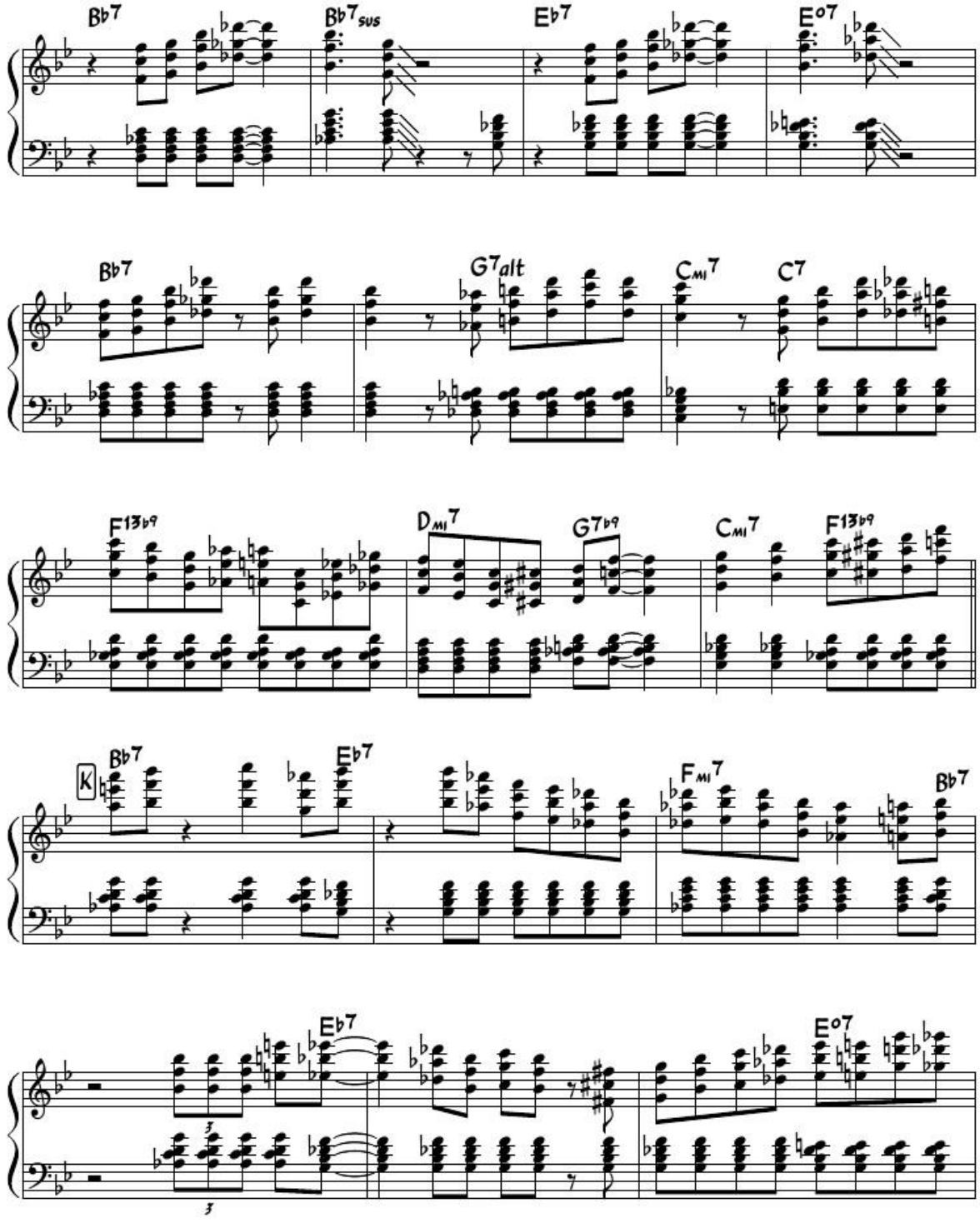

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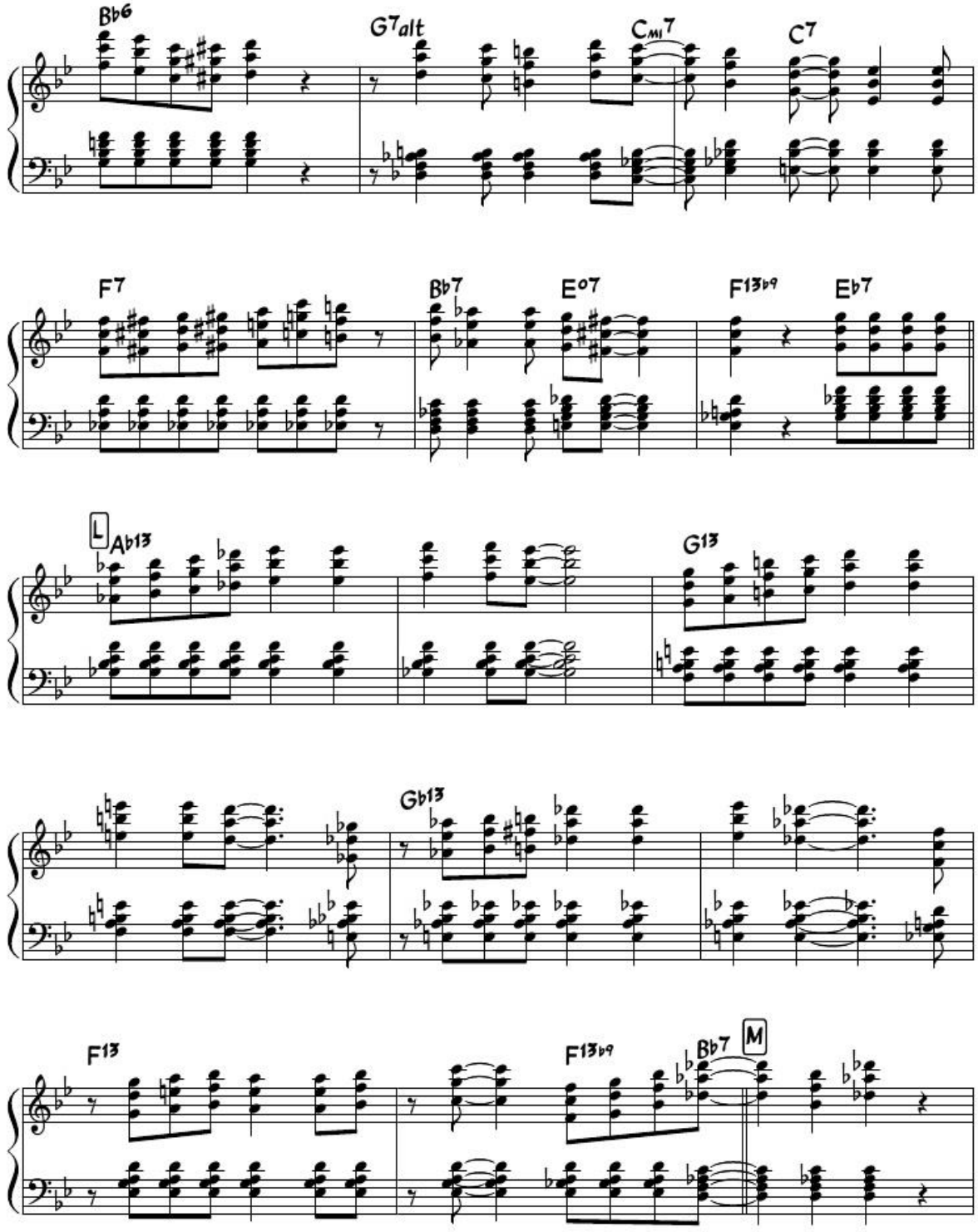

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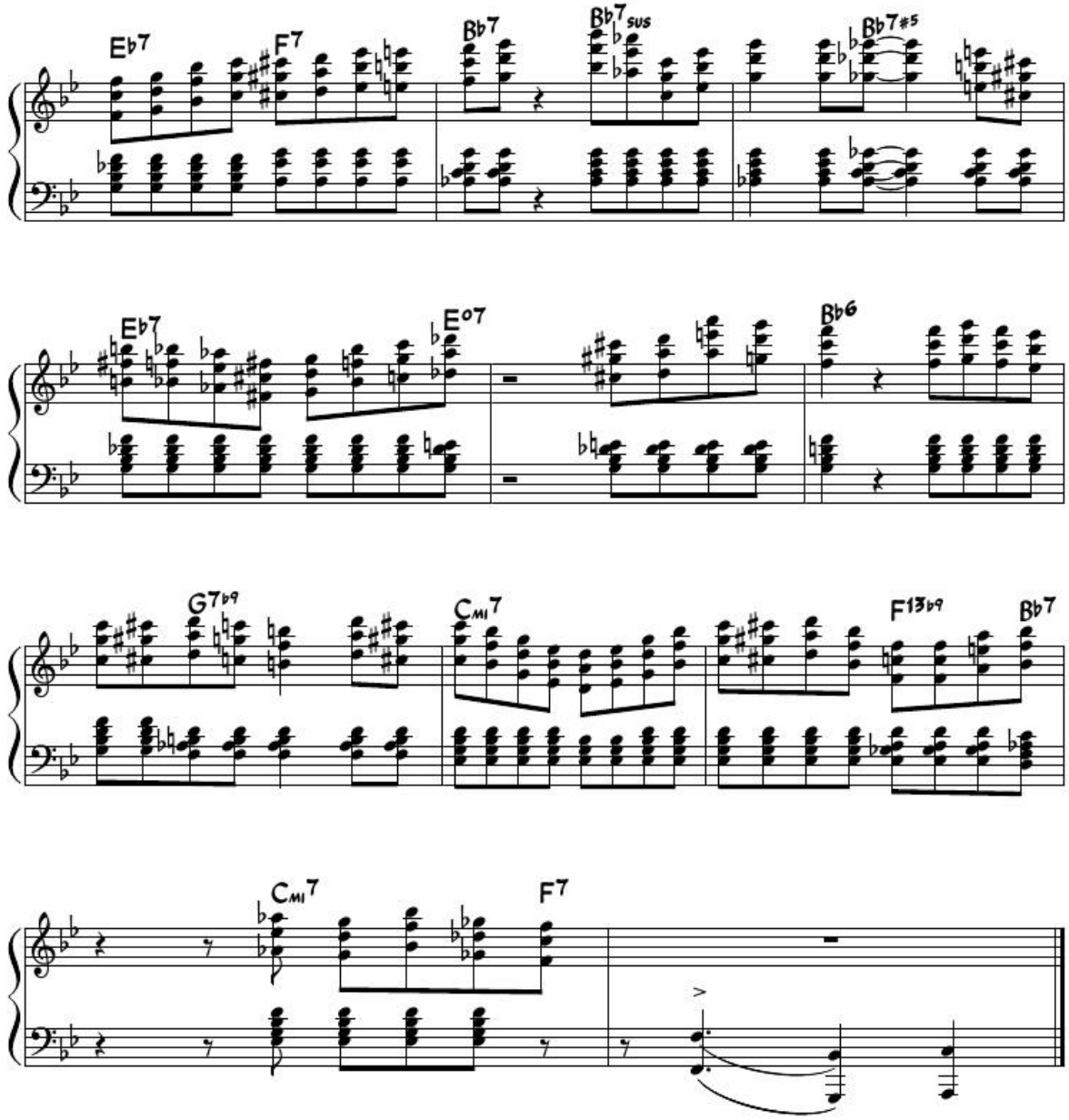


4.4.1 VIBRAPHONE ADAPTATION OF RED GARLAND'S SOLO ON TRANEING IN

Applying Red Garland's block chord style to the vibraphone is a daunting task. Utilizing seven-note chords that span more than an octave is not something that transfers well to the vibraphone. Despite this, I would argue that there are elements of his approach that can be successfully applied to the vibraphone.

In order to adapt Garland's solo, his voicings need to be simplified and limited to four-note voicings. To adapt his left-hand voicings, the simple solution is to play only leading tones (3^{rds} and 7^{ths}). Alternatively, one leading tone could be played along with another chord tone, such as the 5^{th} or 9^{th}.

To adapt Garland's right-hand voicings, there are a few options. The lowest voice in the left hand could be omitted, creating a perfect 4^{th}. The middle voicing could also be omitted. This would create an octave. Lastly, the top line could be played by itself. All of these options would work, and I suggest experimenting each of them to find which voicings you prefer. I find that playing leading tones in the left hand and perfect fourths in the right hand creates the richest texture. I also believe that it comes closest to recreating the sound of Garland's voicings. See figs. 73-76 demonstrating each of these options. I have also included a full vibraphone adaptation of his solo on the following pages.

Fig. 73: Excerpt of Garland's solo on Traneing In, utilizing block chords (mm. 88-92).

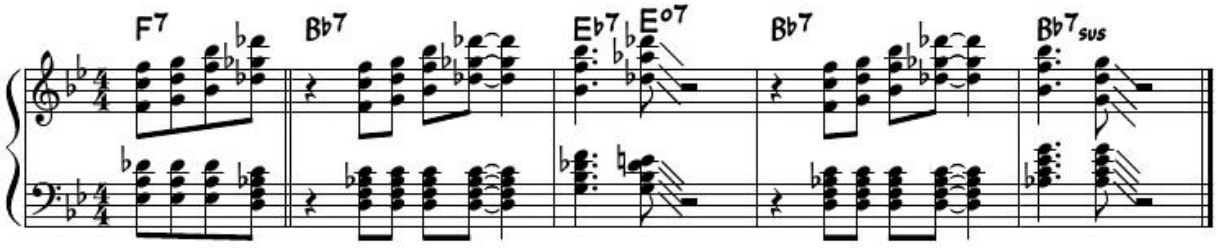


Fig. 74: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 88-92. Note that leading tones are played in the left hand while perfect fourths are played in the right hand (mm. 88-92).

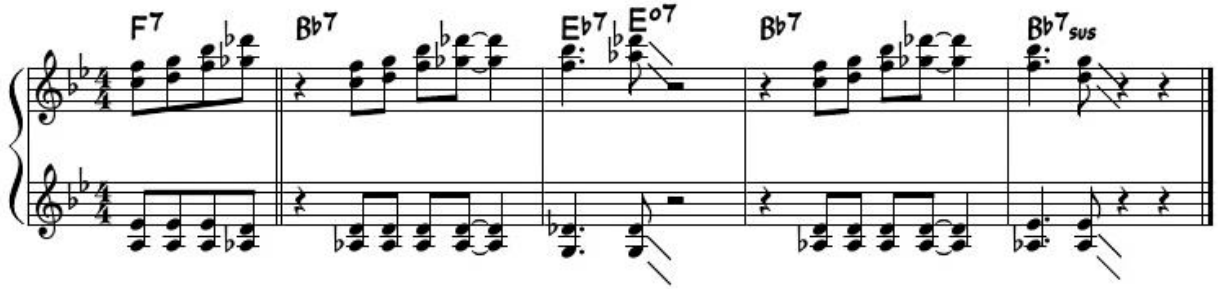


Fig. 75: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 88-92 with octaves played in the right hand.

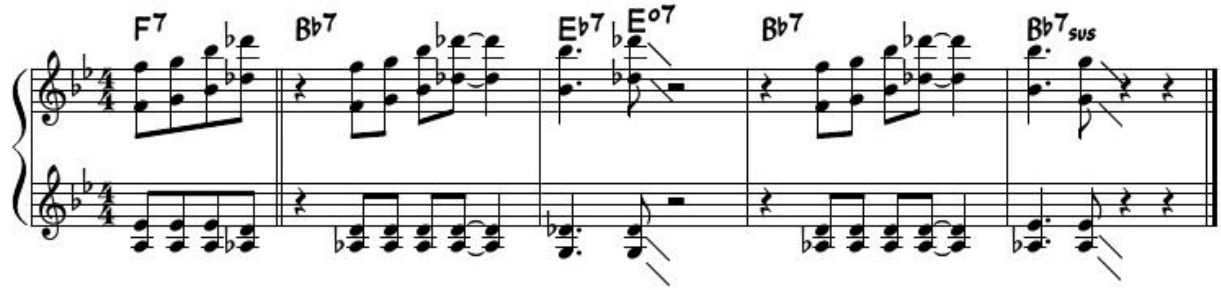
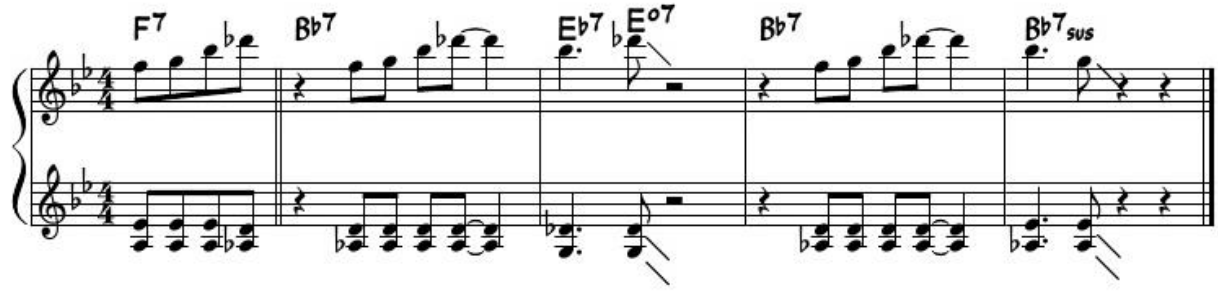
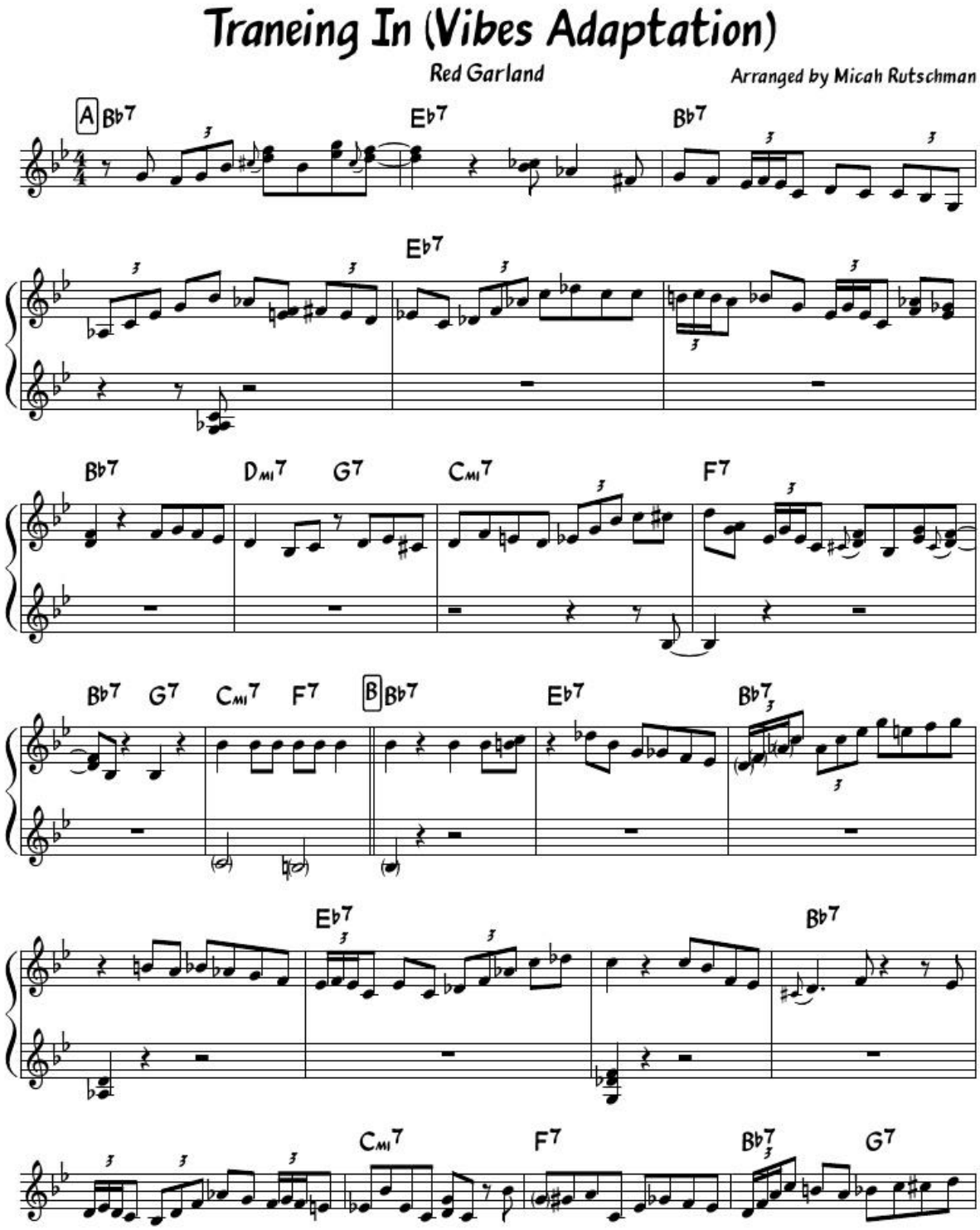


Fig. 76: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 88-92 with a single note melody played in the right hand (mm. 88-92).



Example 8: Vibes adaptation of Red Garland's solo on Traneing In.



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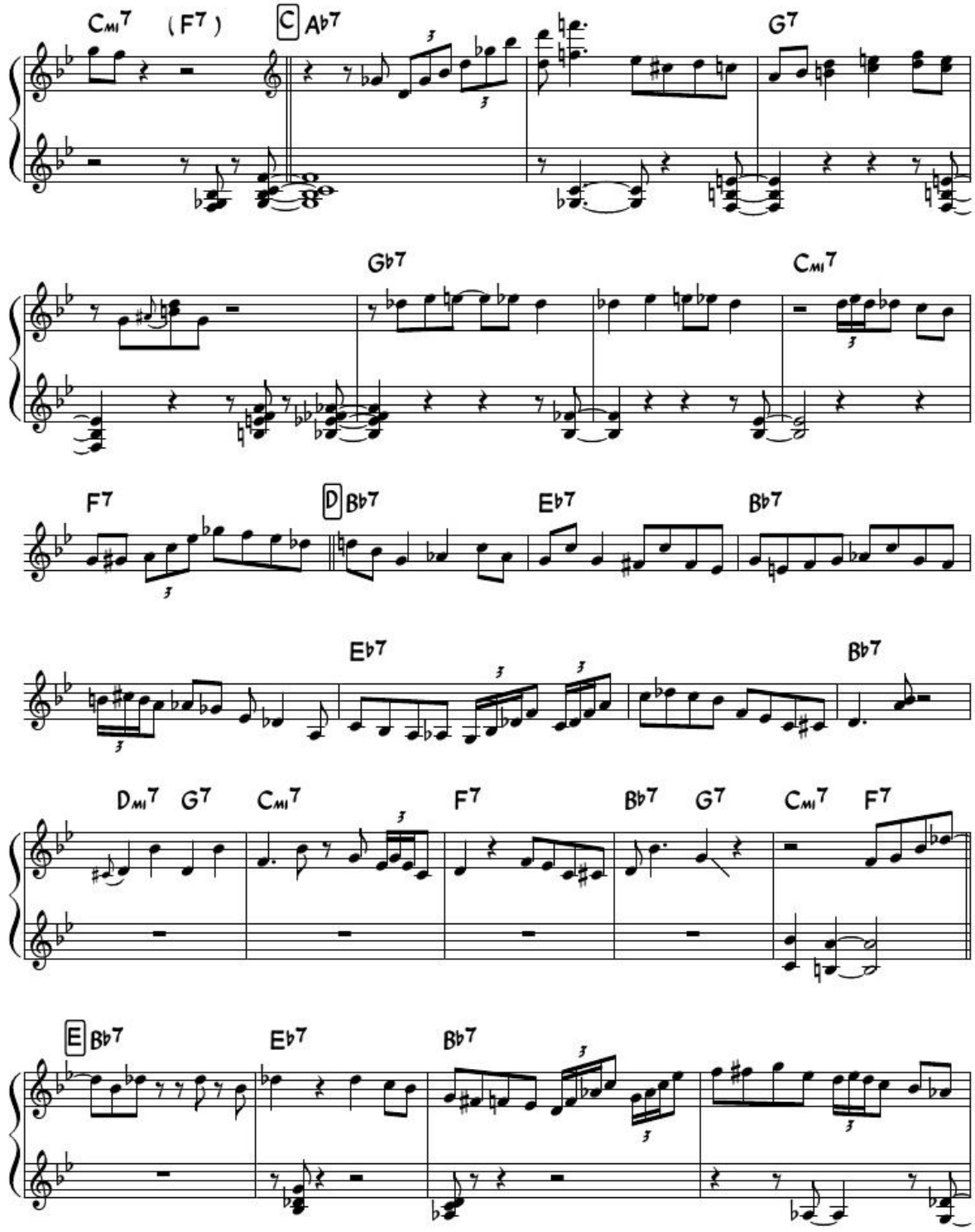

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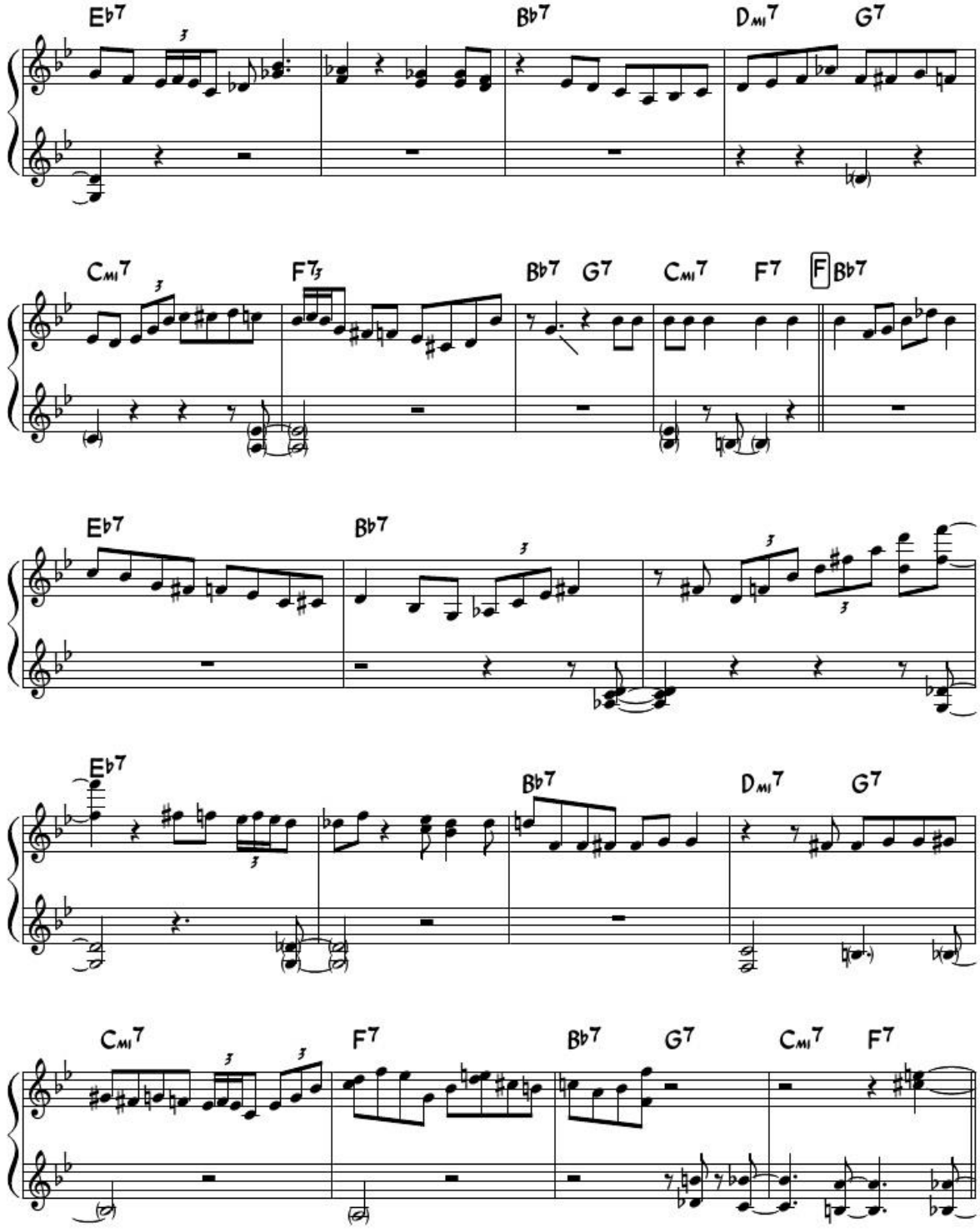

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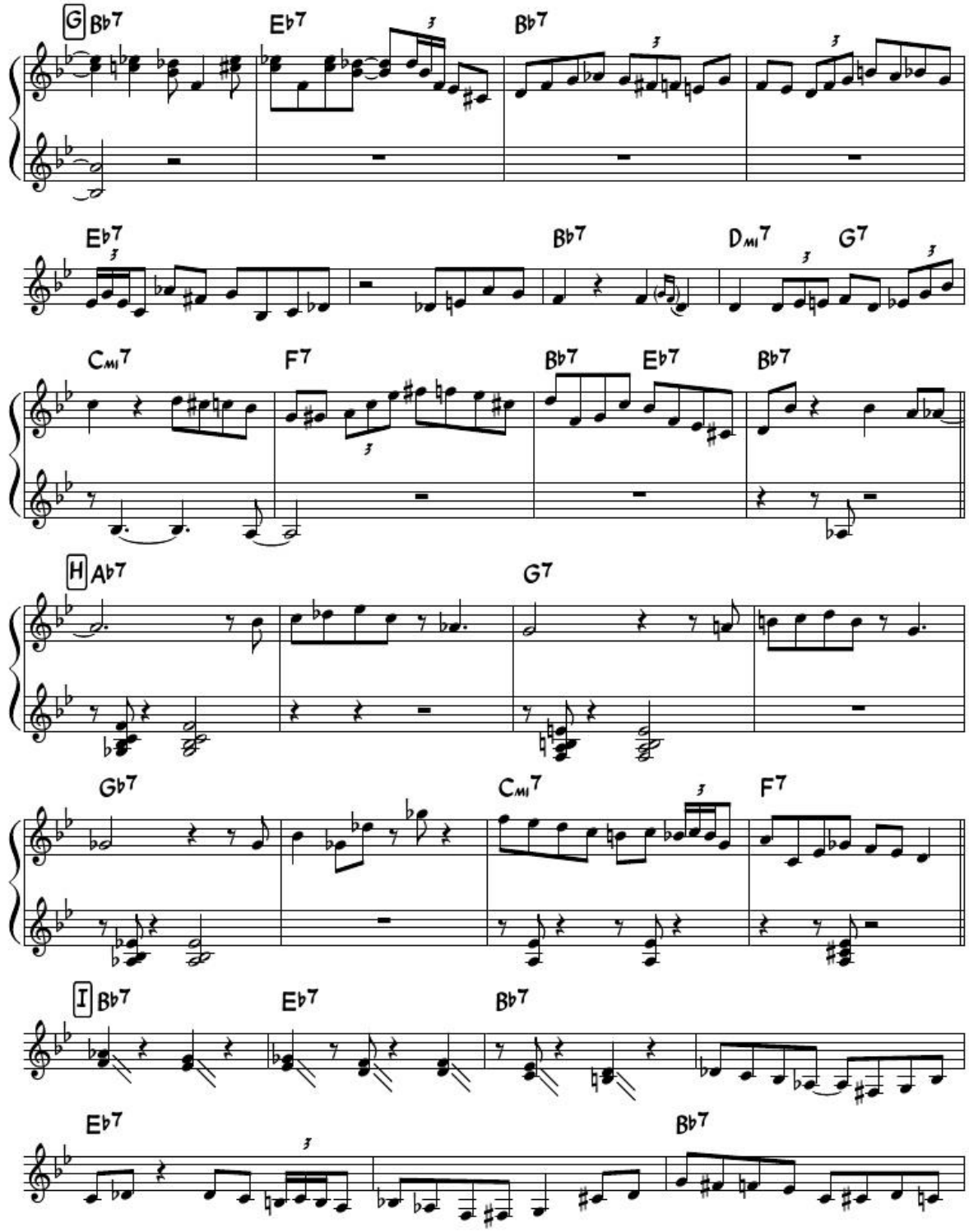

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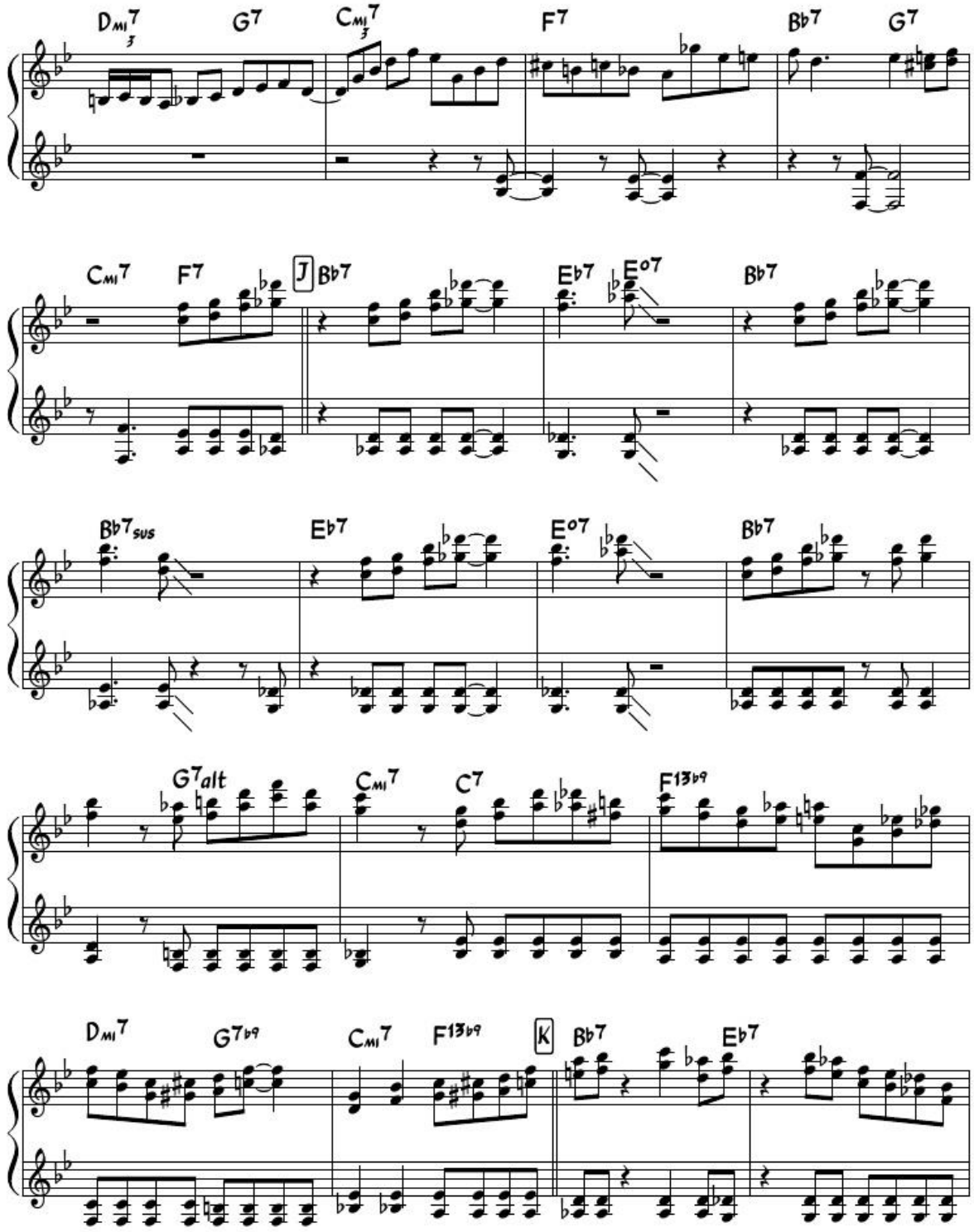

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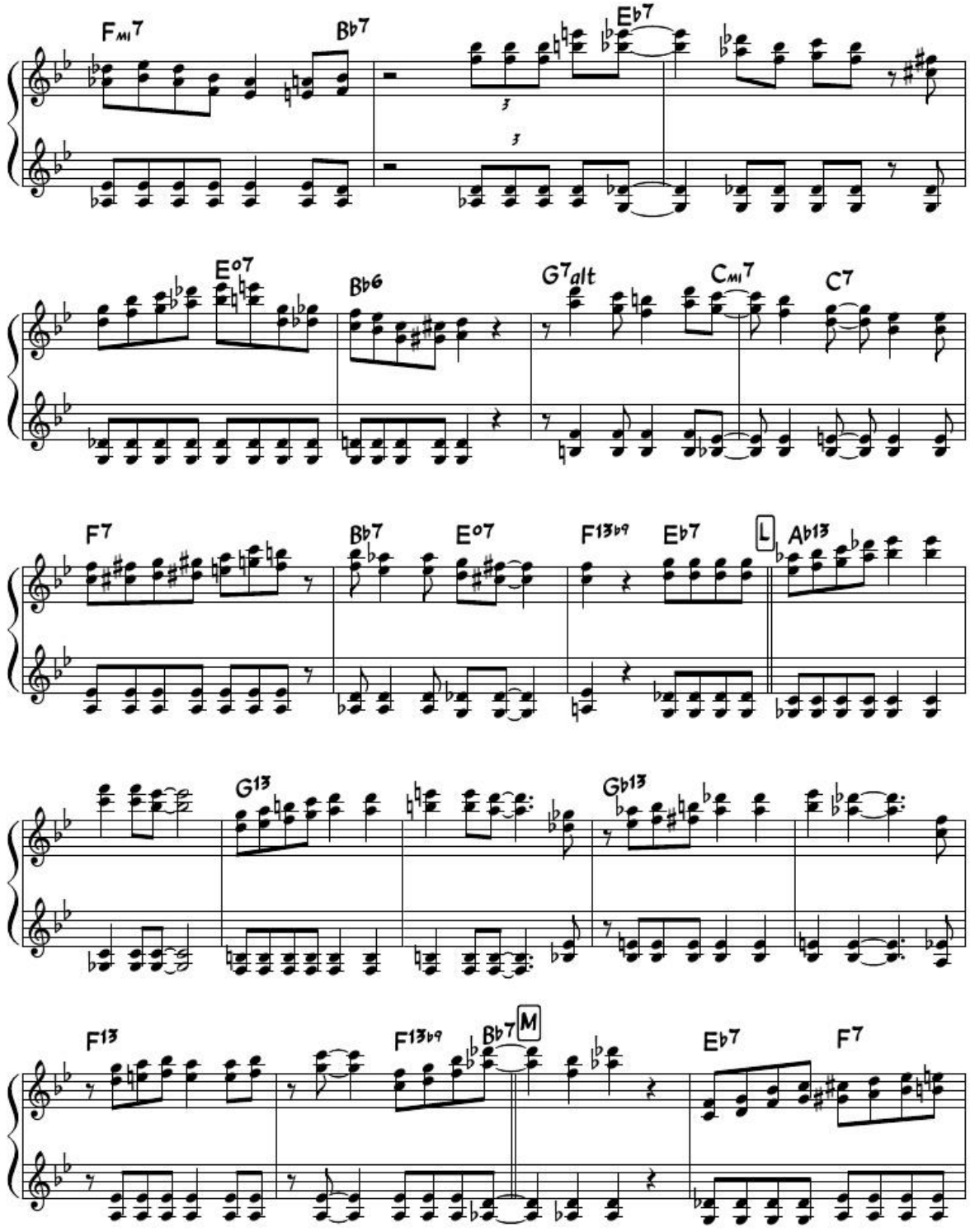

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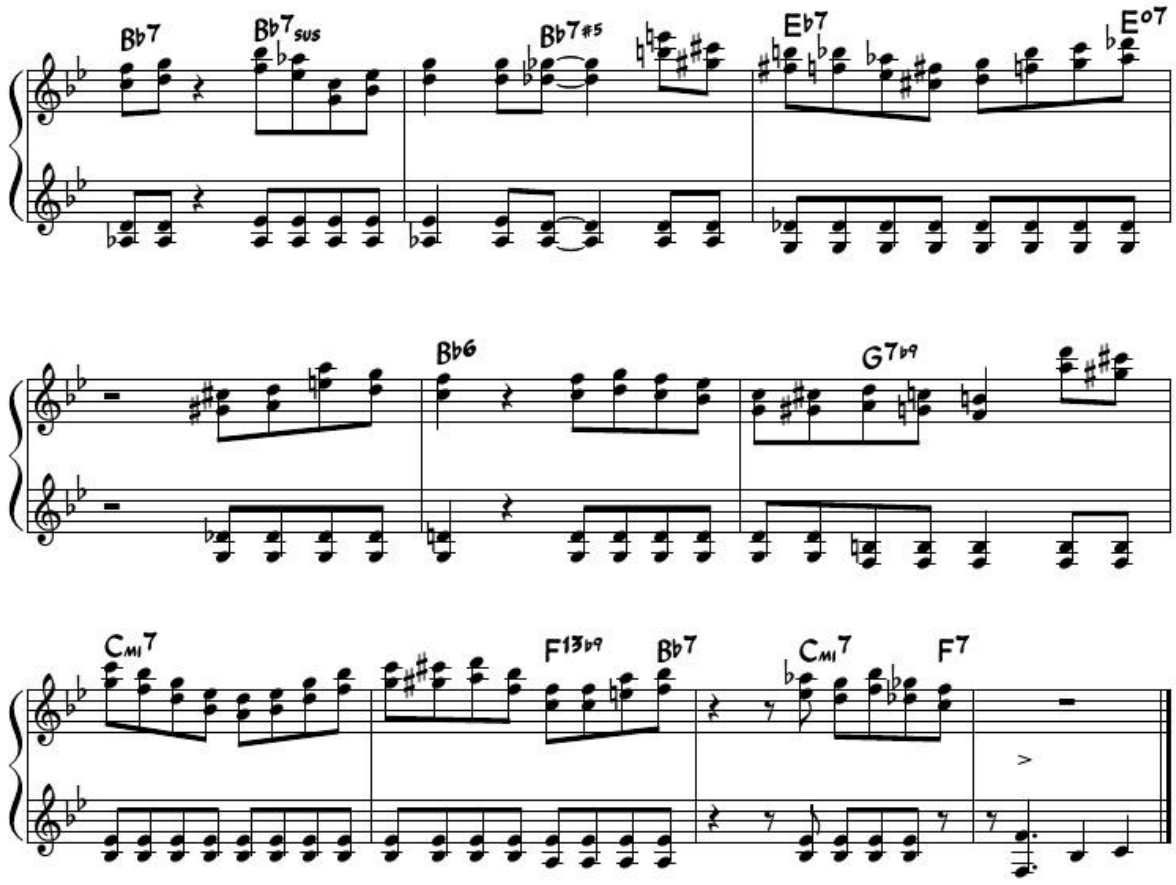


4.5 PHINEAS NEWBORN: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS SOLO ON CABU

Phineas Newborn is another great jazz pianist that adopted the "locked hands" style pioneered by Milt Buckner. In his playing on *Cabu*, although he uses similar voicings as Buckner, Shearing, and Peterson, I would argue that his approach to block chord playing is very unique.

In his solo on *Cabu*, Newborn uses the "locked hands" approach extensively, but there is a striking difference in the way that he utilizes it. Rather than playing lines that are entirely composed of "locked hands" voicings, he often adds only a few chords to his melodic ideas. A majority of his melodic phrases are played in octaves, with only a handful of chords added (see fig. 77). In other instances, Newborn plays "locked hands" chords mixed with left hand melodies (see fig. 78).

Fig. 77: Example of Newborn's mixture of "locked hands" voicings and notes played in octaves (mm. 49-52).

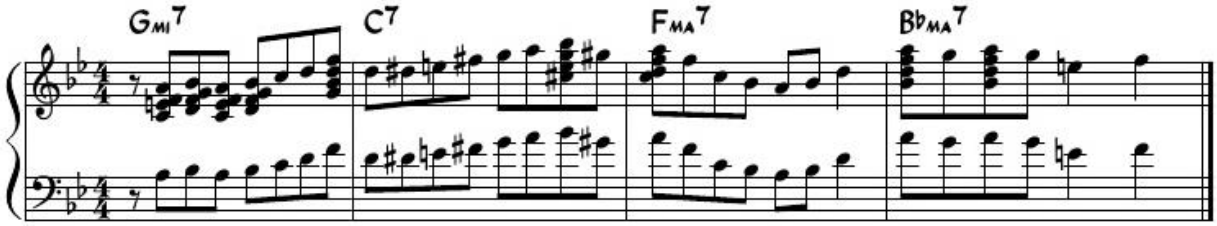
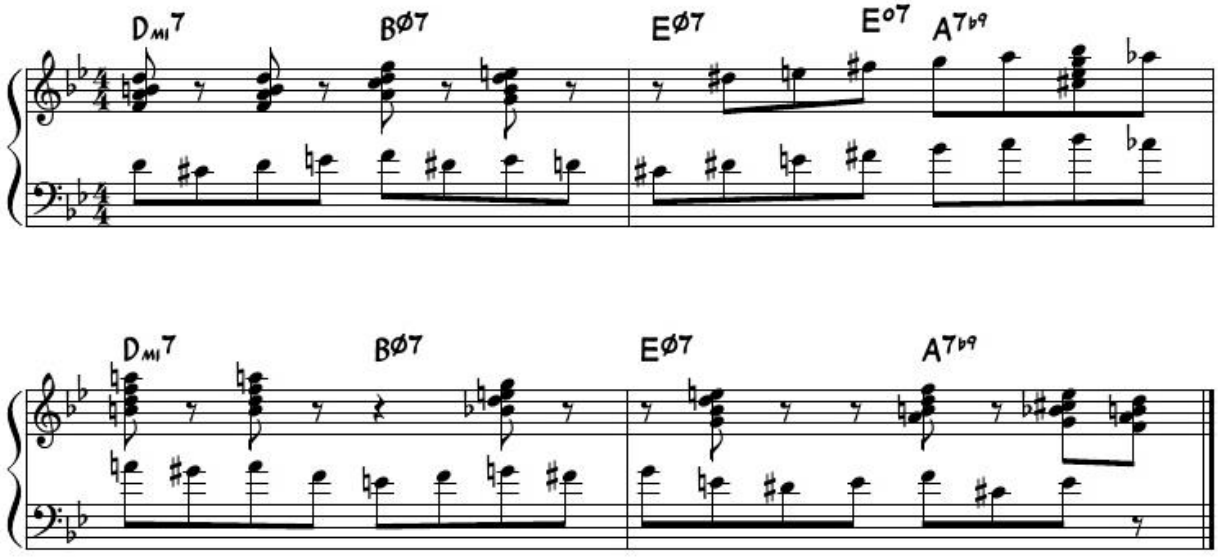


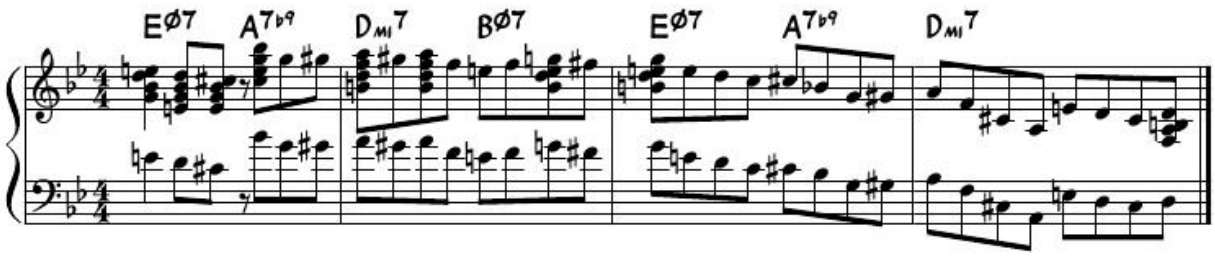
Fig. 78: Example of Newborn's mixture of "locked hands" voicings and left-hand melodies (mm. 73-76).



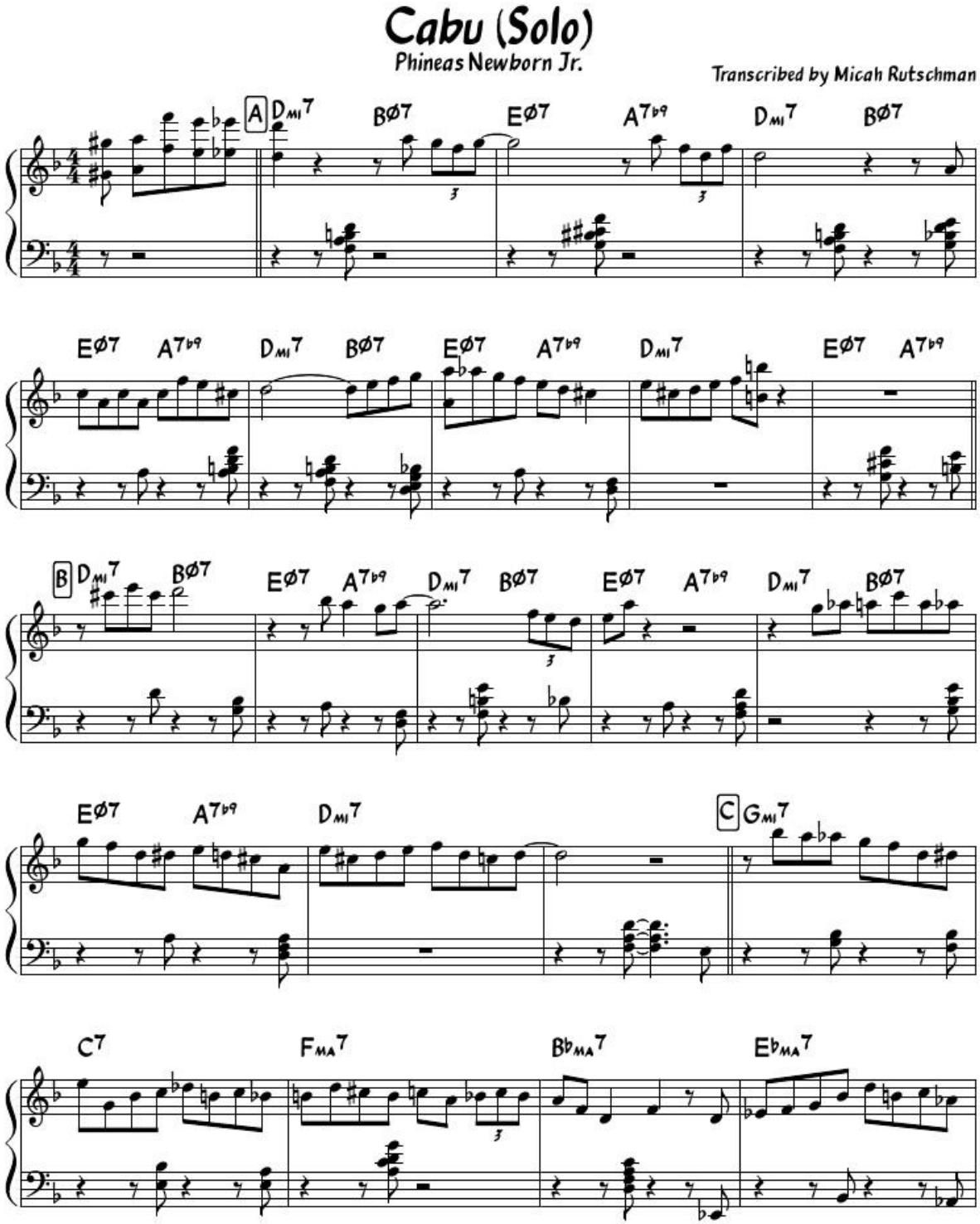
Although we have seen both of these techniques used by Oscar Peterson in his solo on *Dream of You*, Newborn's use of chords in his phrases is far sparser. Although this could be attributed to the fact that *Cabu* is played at a significantly faster tempo than *Dream of You* is, I would argue that the difference lies in each of the pianists' styles and unique approach to block chord playing.

What I find fascinating about Newborn's playing on *Cabu* is that despite his sparse use of block chords, it still sounds like block chord playing. One of the reasons for this lies in where he decides to place chords in his lines. In many cases, he inserts them at the beginning and endings of phrases, which gives the listener just enough information to suggest that the whole line is comprised of chords (see fig. 79). I have included a full transcription of Newborn's solo from *Cabu* on the following pages.

Fig. 79: Example of Newborn's placement of chords at the beginning and end of phrases (mm. 44-47).



Example 9: Transcription of Phineas Newborn's solo on Cabu.



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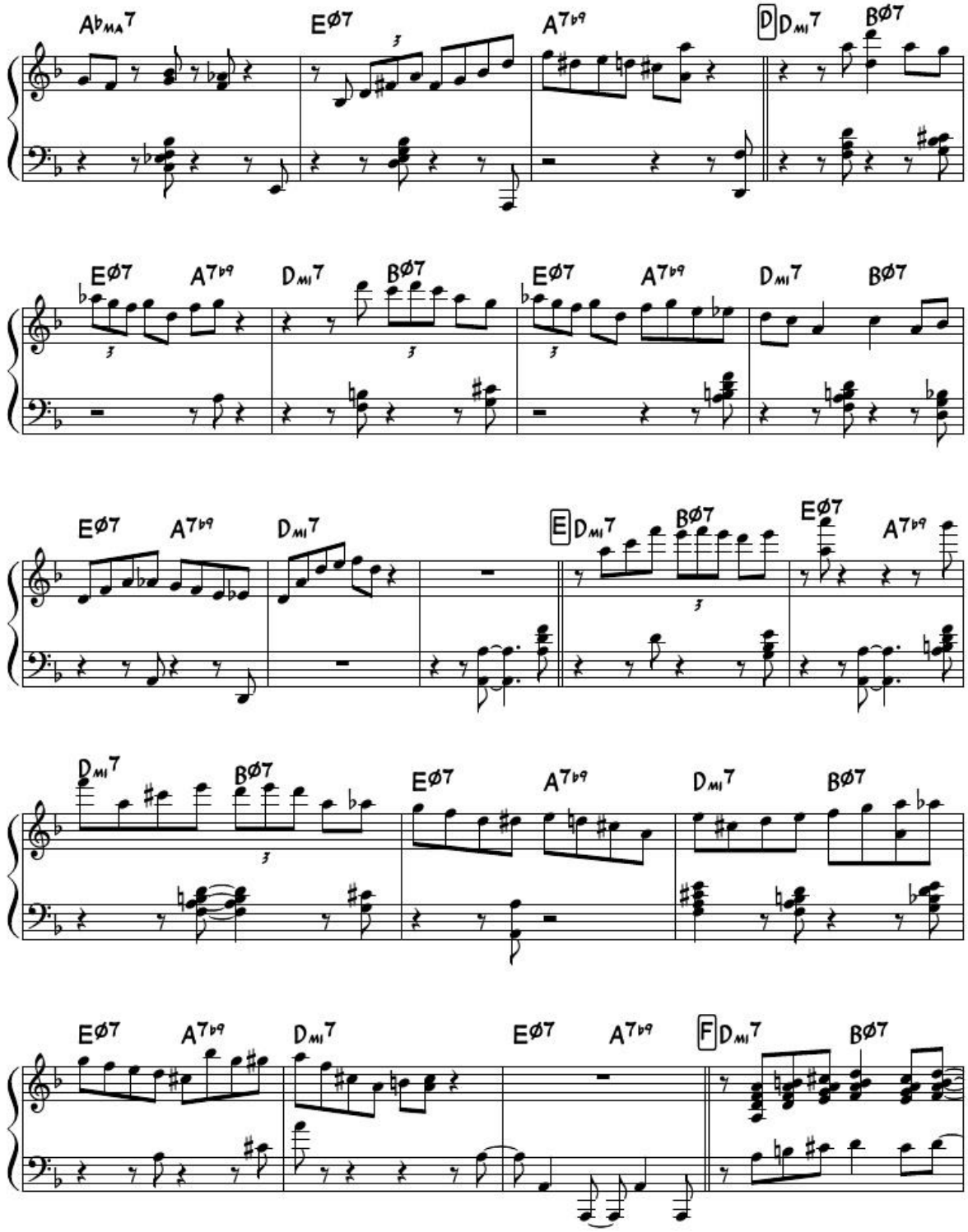

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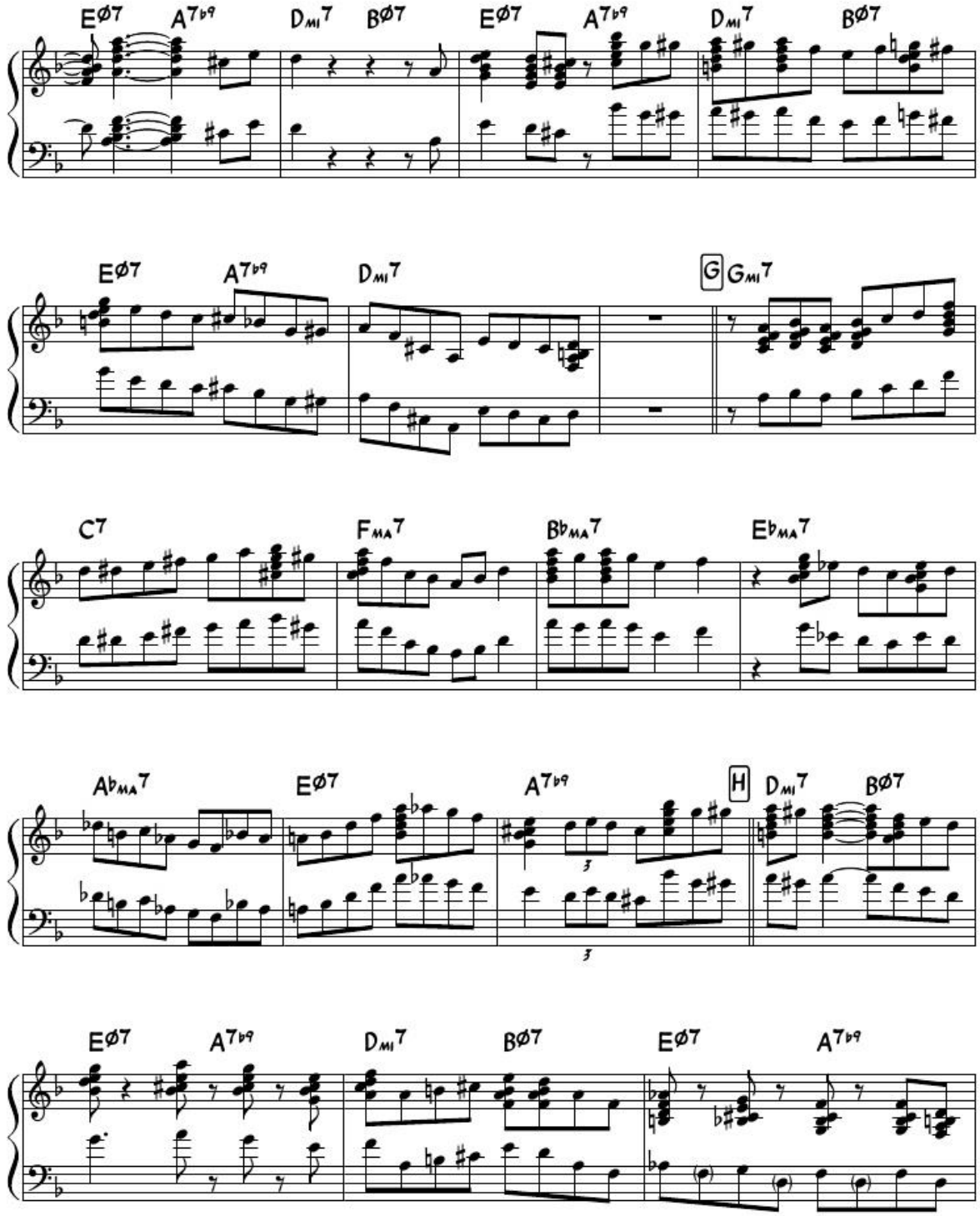
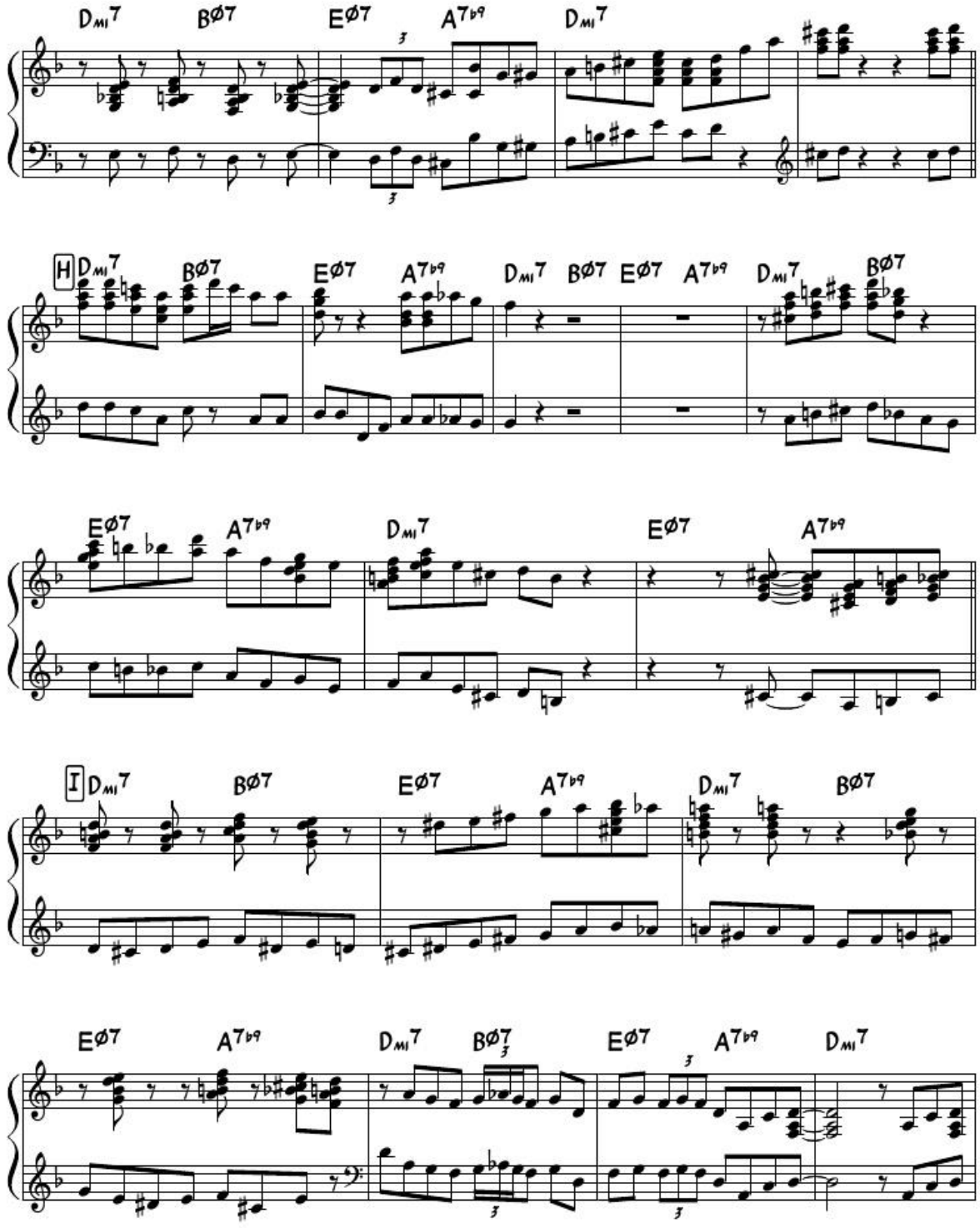


Example 9 (cont.)



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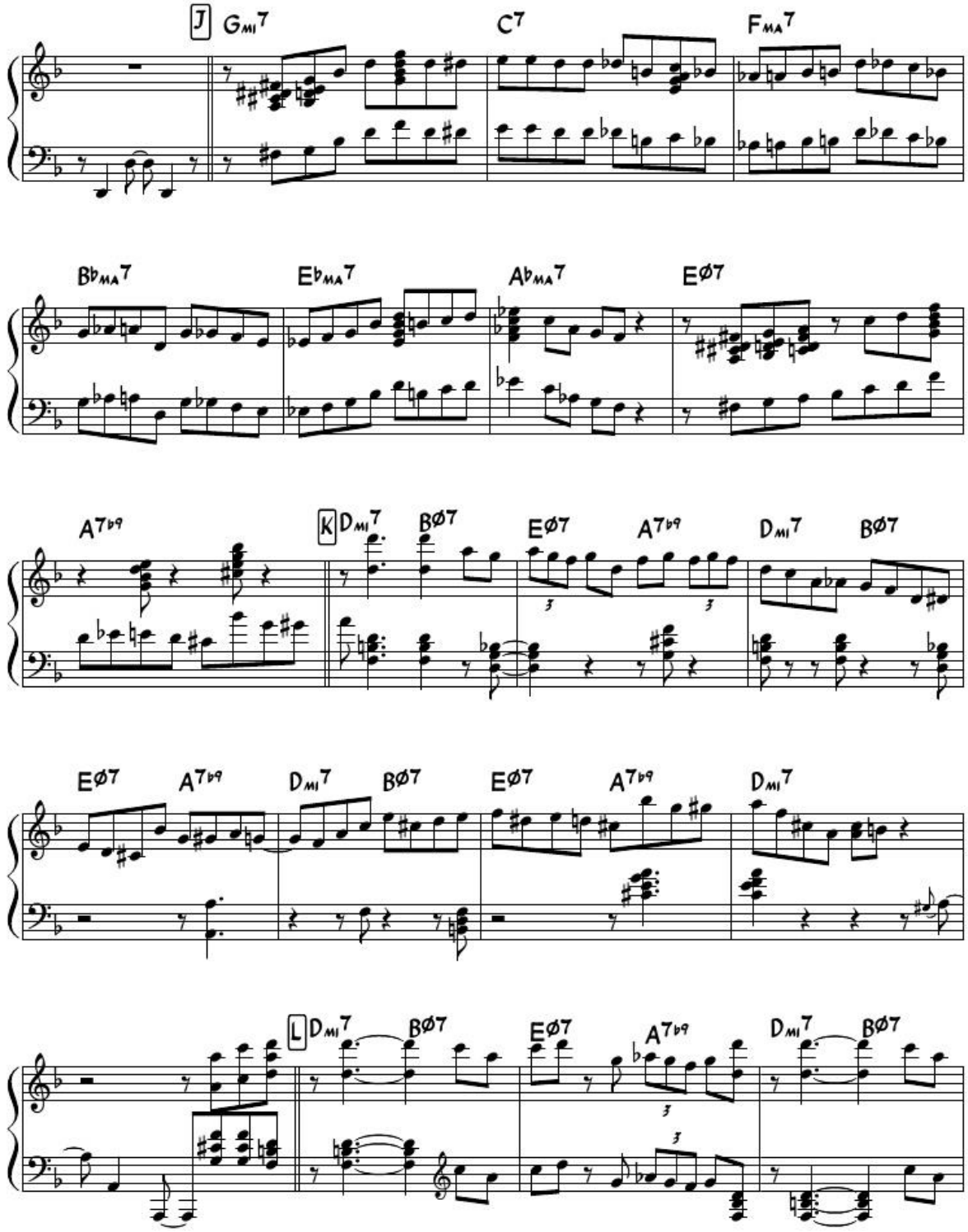

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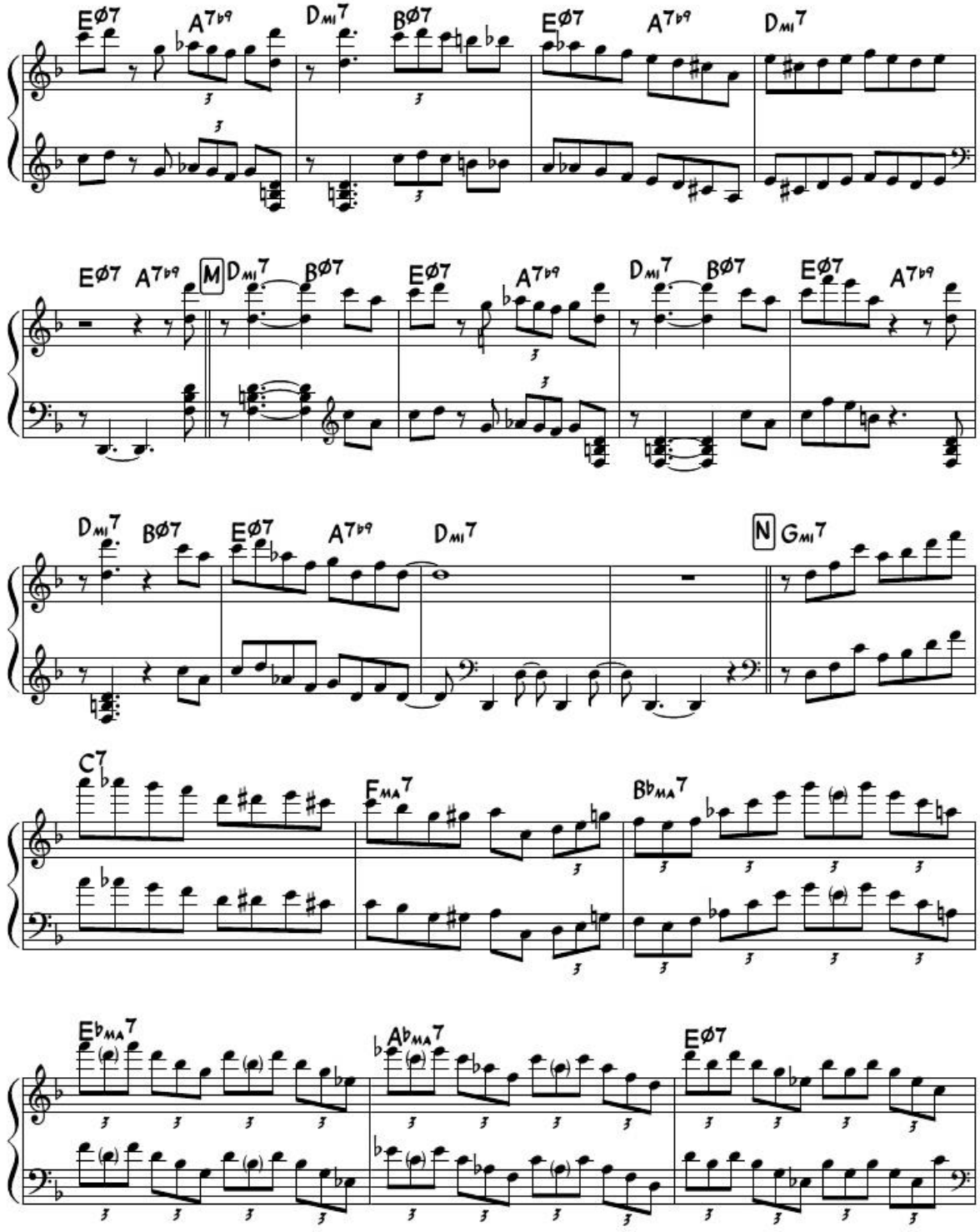

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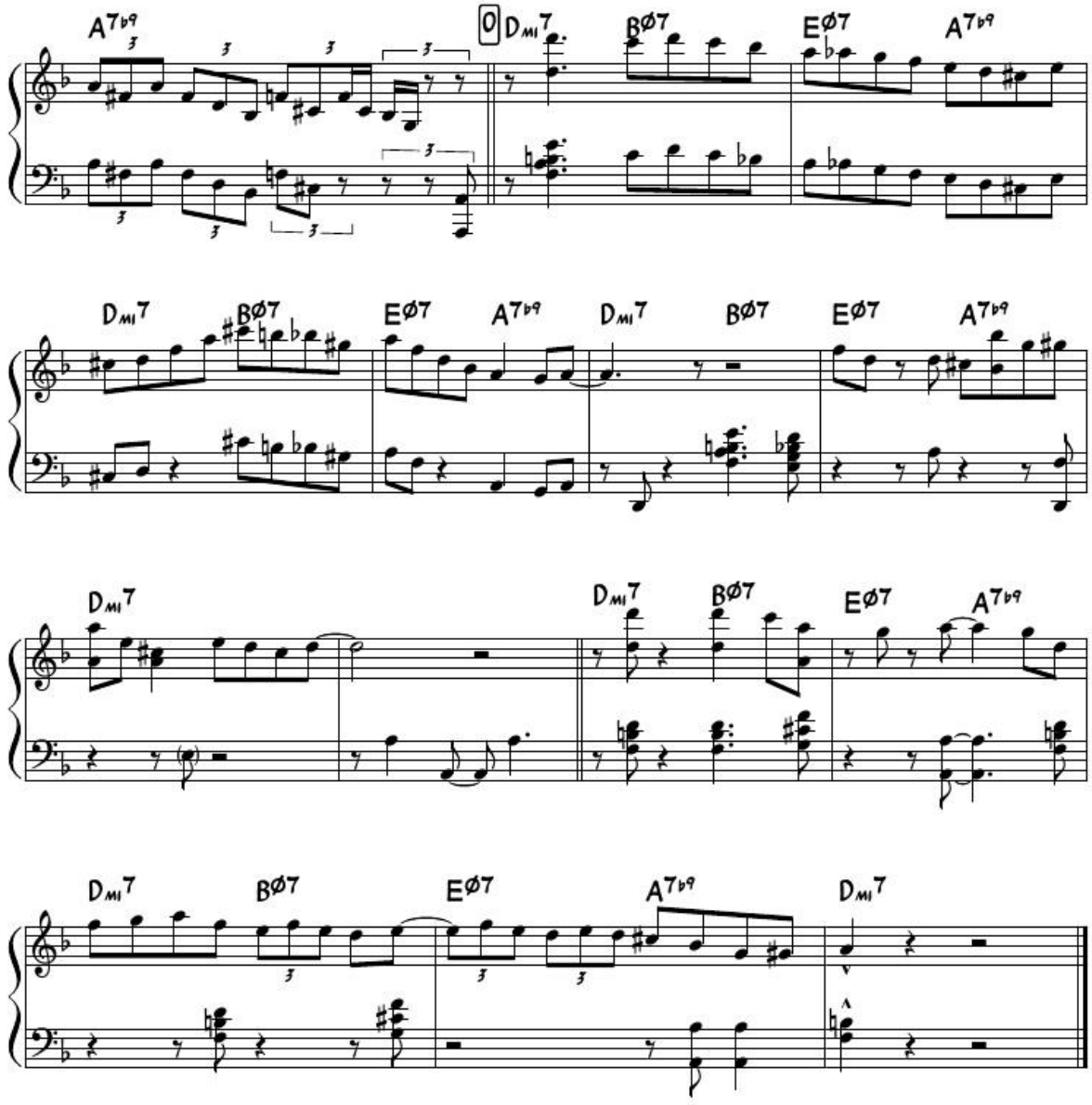


4.5.1 VIBRAPHONE ADAPTATION OF PHINEAS NEWBORN'S SOLO ON CABU

Phineas Newborn's use of block chords to punctuate melodic lines is an approach that works well on vibraphone. Because playing block chords at faster tempos is challenging on the vibraphone, adding chords to the beginning and ending of phrases can be a good solution in these situations. This approach can give the impression that a melodic line is composed entirely of chords, while making playing at faster tempos much easier.

In the example below, Newborn plays a three-measure phrase made up entirely of eighth notes. Note that he only plays block chords for five notes, and that he begins and ends his phrase with a chord (see fig. 80). To adapt this excerpt for vibraphone, I excluded the octaves for the melody, as well as the lowest voicing of the chords (see fig. 81). Although the octaves could be played on vibraphone, playing a single note melody instead makes is much easier.

Fig. 80: Newborn begins and ends his phrases with a chord (mm. 45-47).

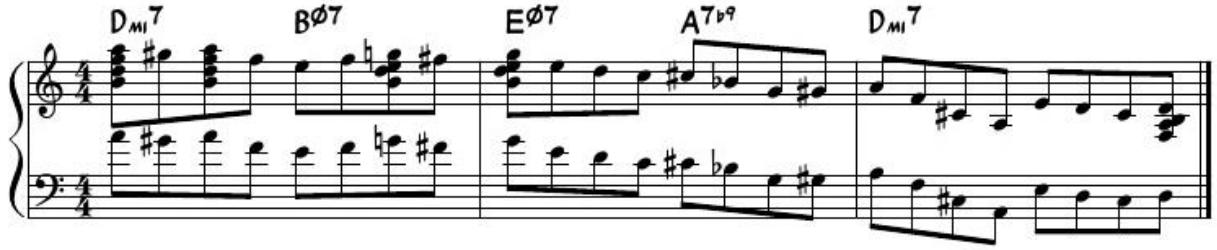
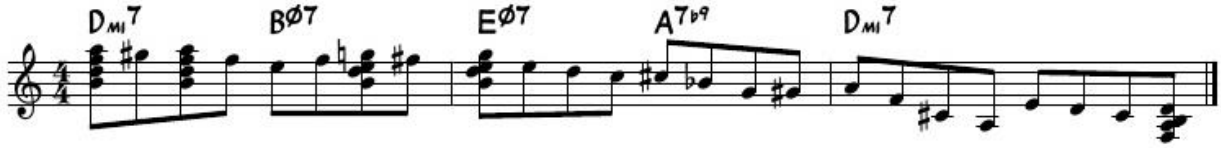


Fig. 81: Measures 45-47 adapted for the vibraphone.



Earlier I mentioned Newborn's use of chords mixed with melodic content played in the left hand in measures 73-76 (see fig. 82). To adapt “locked hands” voicings to the vibraphone, I have suggested omitting the lowest voice most of the time. Although this approach works well, in this specific case, the melodic thread is in the lowest voice. To maintain the shape of the melody in this excerpt, I have omitted the middle voice instead (see fig. 83). While this may seem a little unusual at first, I have found that it creates a very interesting sound. I have included a full vibraphone adaptation of Newborn's solo from *Cabu* on the following pages.

Fig. 82: Newborn's use of chords mixed with a left-hand melody (mm. 73-76).

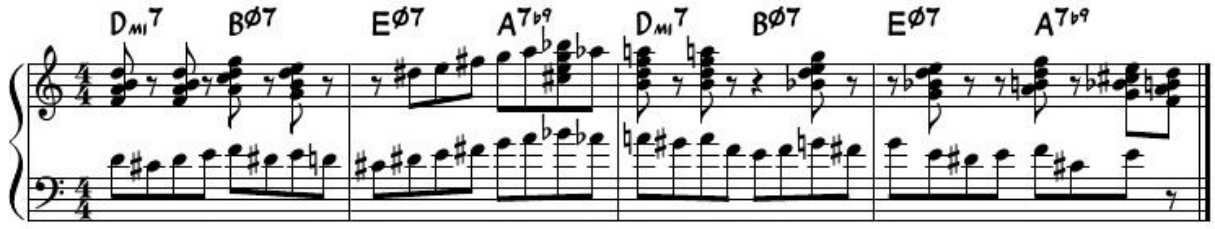
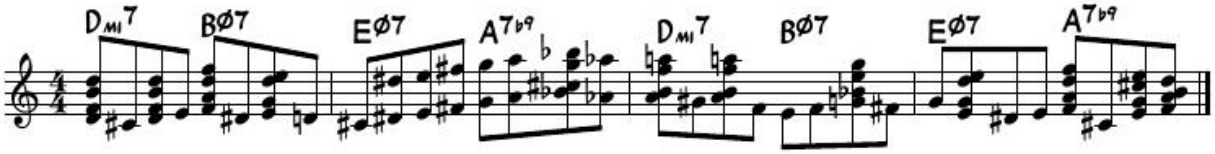
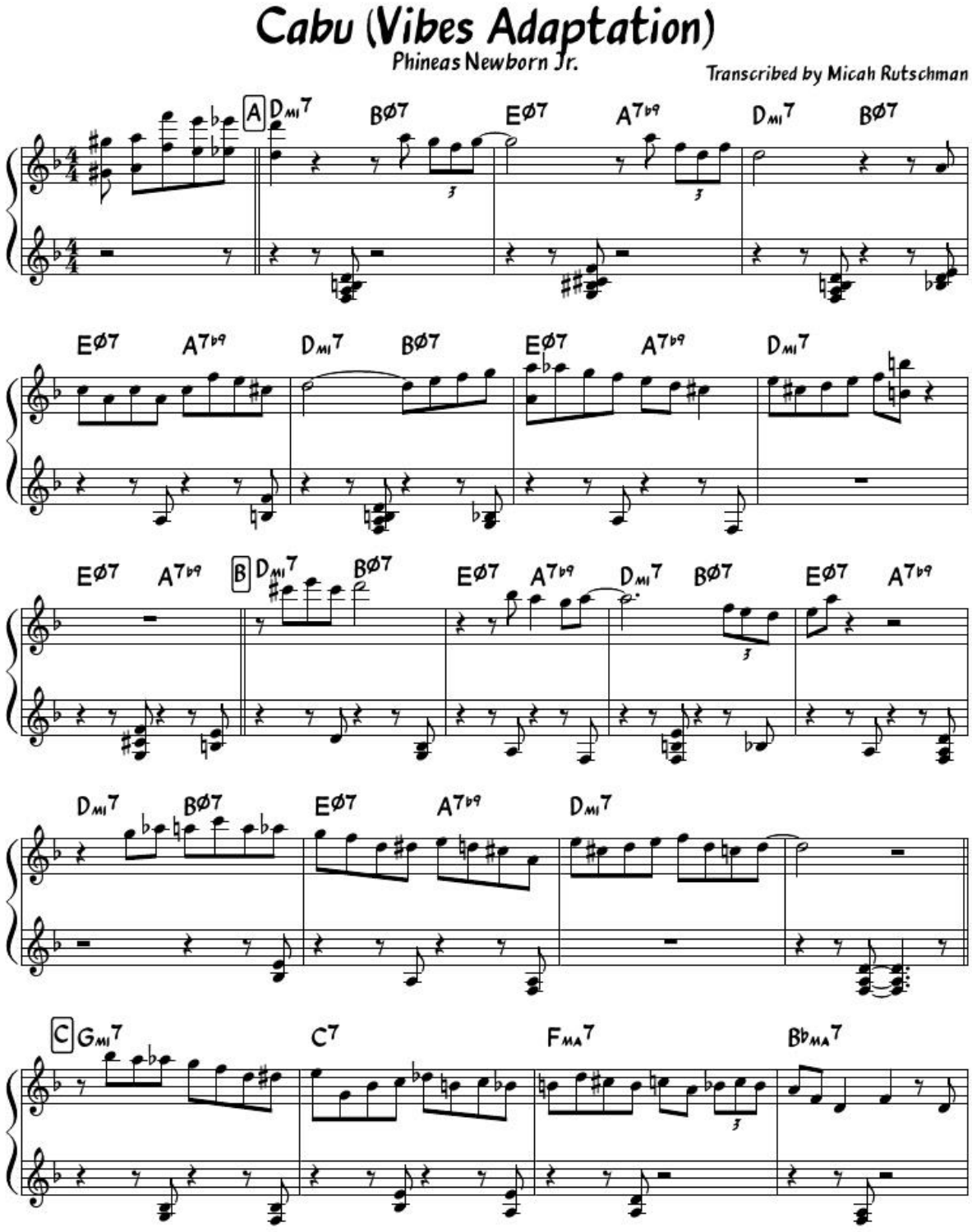


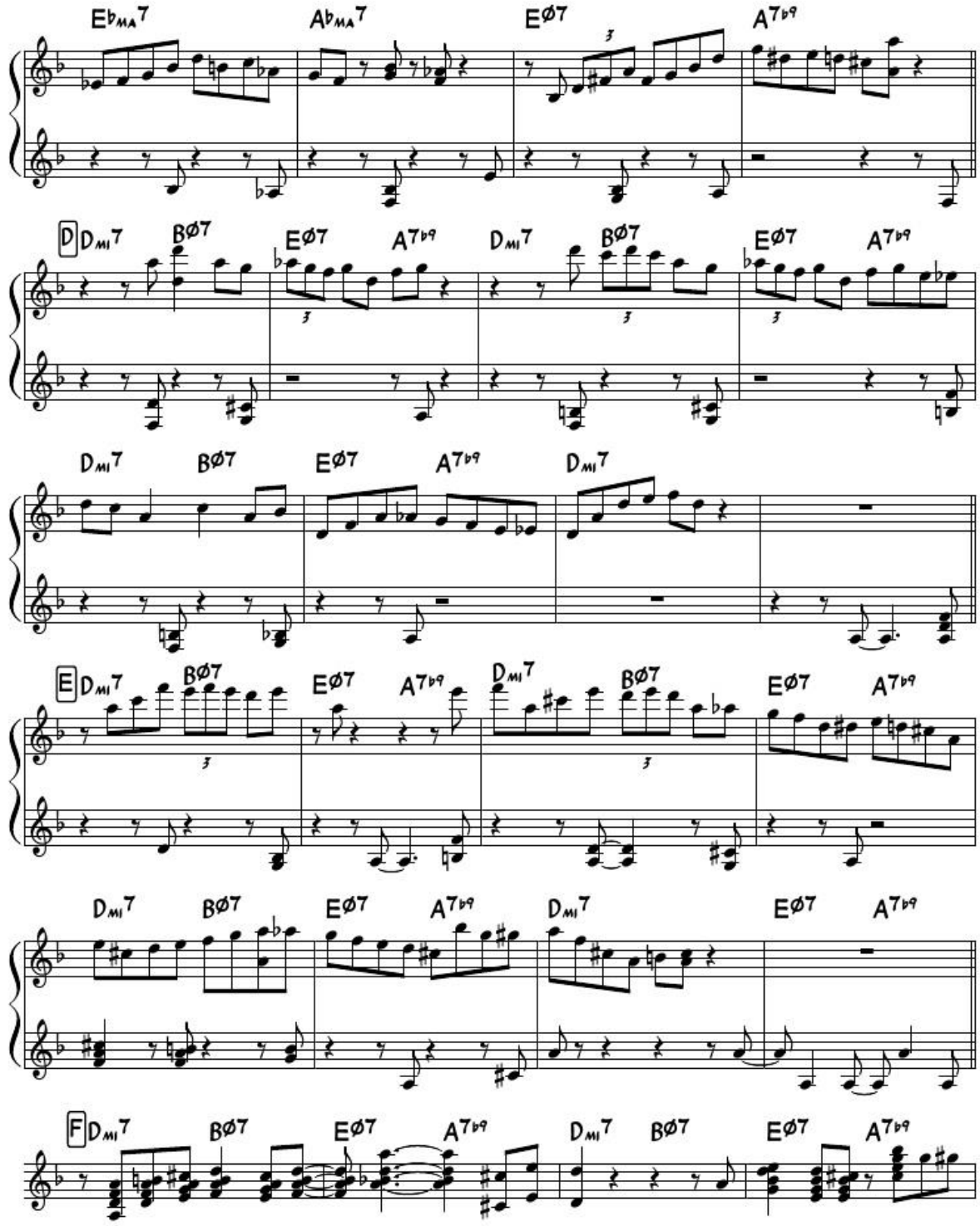
Fig. 83: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 73-76 on Newborn's solo on Cabu.



Example 10: Vibes adaptation of Phineas Newborn's solo on Cabu.



Example 10 (cont.)



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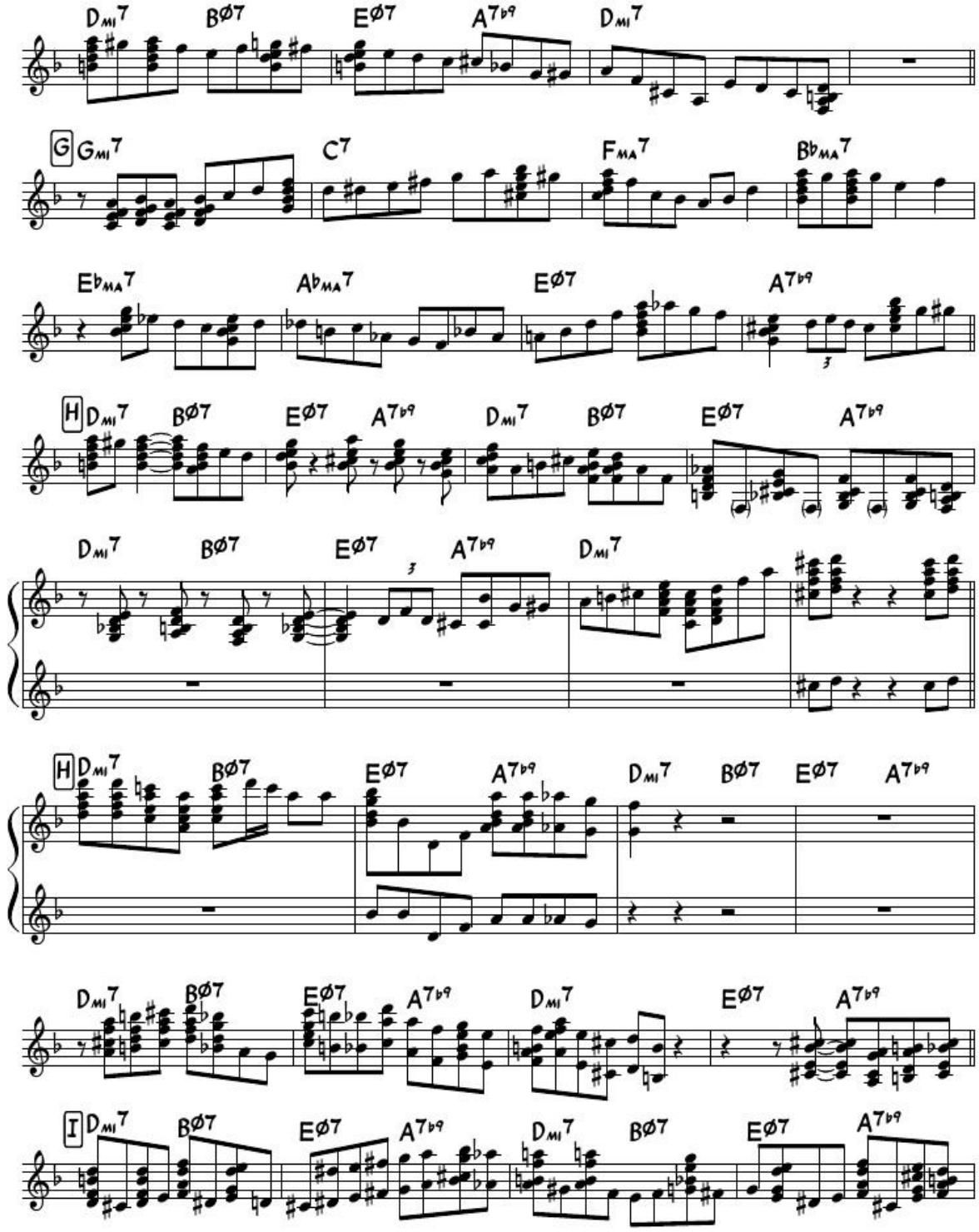
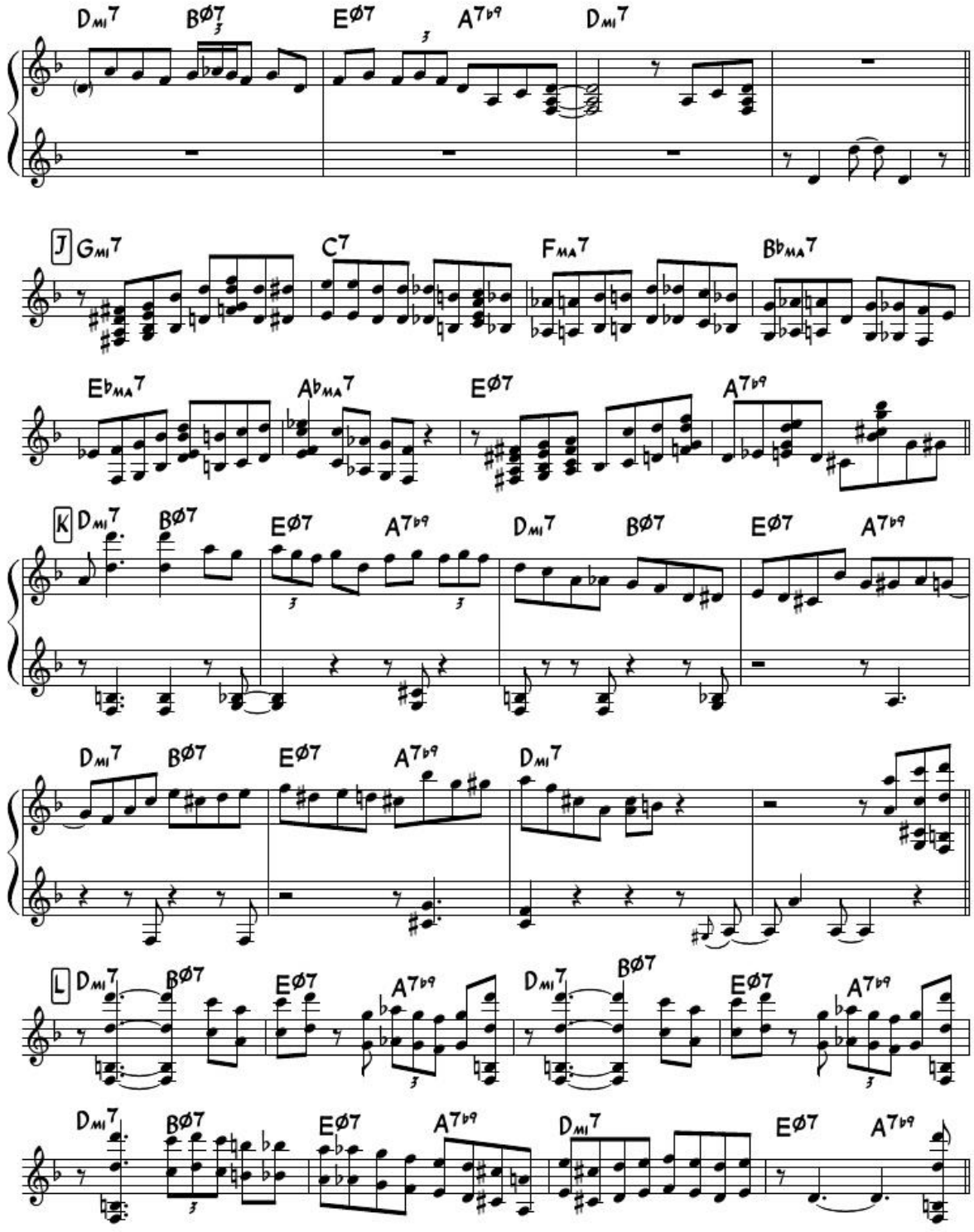


Example 10 (cont.)



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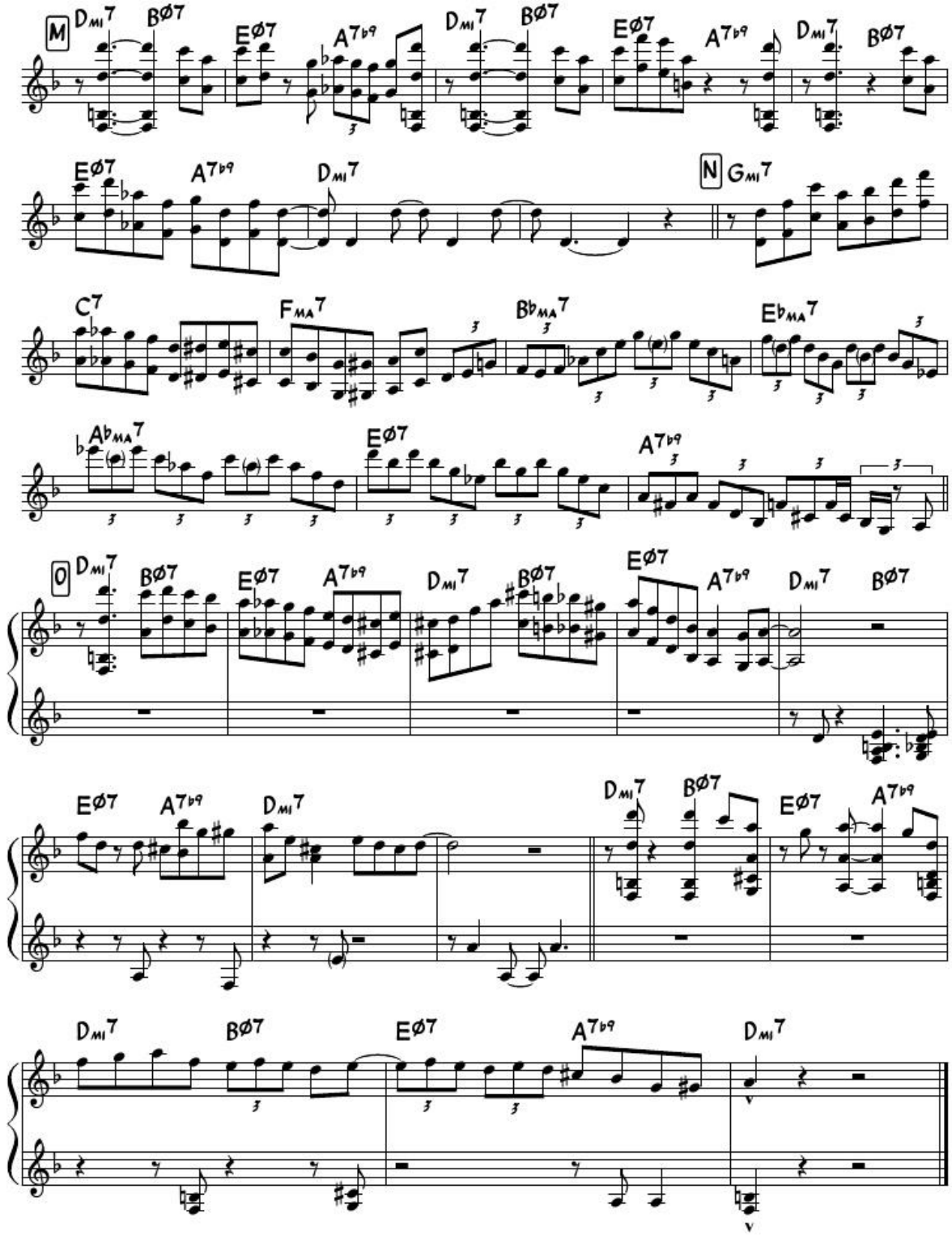


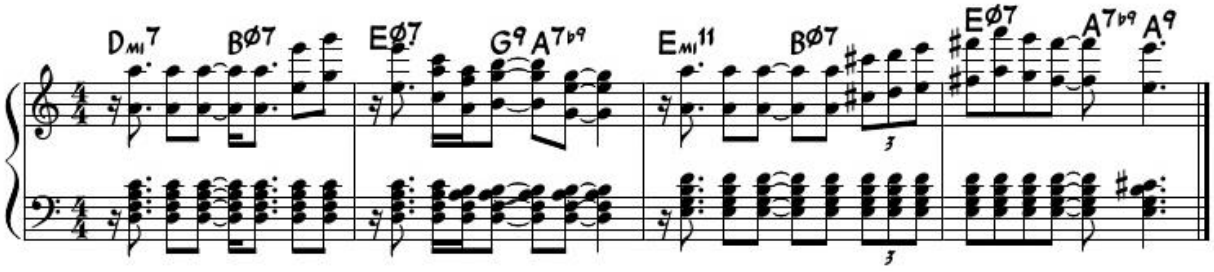
4.6 MCCOY TYNER: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS SOLO ON SATIN DOLL

McCoy Tyner may seem like an unusual choice to discuss when studying block chord playing. There are not nearly as many recorded examples of McCoy Tyner playing in a block chord style as there are for the other pianists that have been discussed in previous sections. That being said, Tyner did use block chord techniques in his playing, and his approach offers insight into a less conventional way to utilize block chords when soloing.

Tyner's recording of *Satin Doll* from his album *Nights of Ballads & Blues* is a good example of his approach to block chord playing. He plays block chords for the melody in the A sections of the head, as well as during his solo. Interestingly, he does not commit to using just one block chord approach. He utilizes multiple types of block chord voicings throughout his solo.

Tyner begins his 2nd chorus with a four-measure long phrase of block chords (mm. 33-36). His left hand plays a closed position voicing while his right hand plays octaves for most of the phrase. In the third measure, he adds thirds below the top voice (see fig. 84). Note that these voicings are not that different from Red Garland's approach.

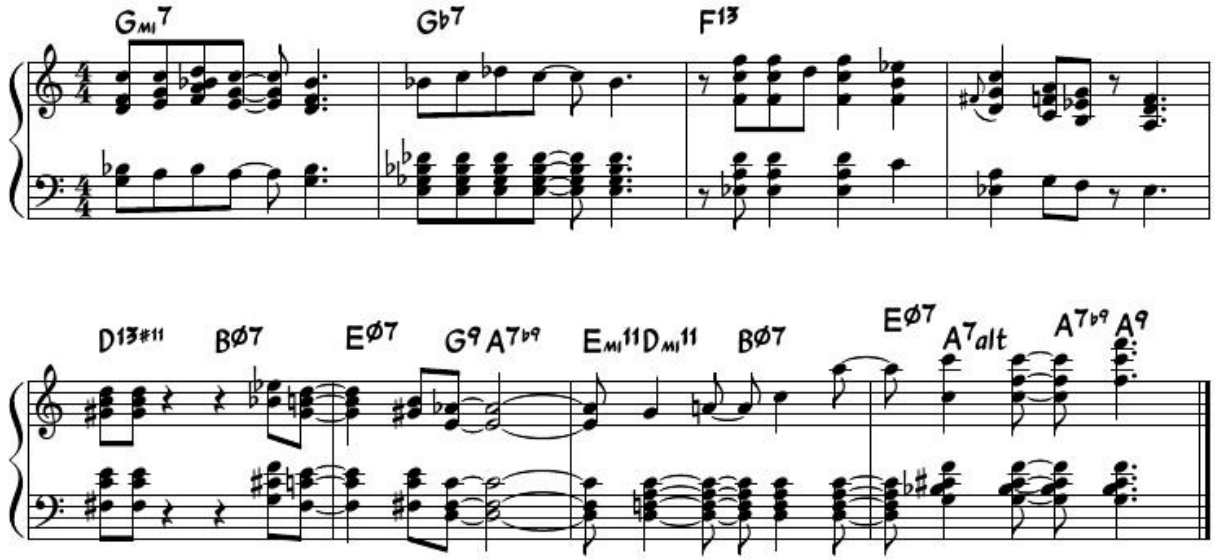
Fig. 84: McCoy Tyner utilizing a block chord approach similar to Red Garland's (mm. 33-36).



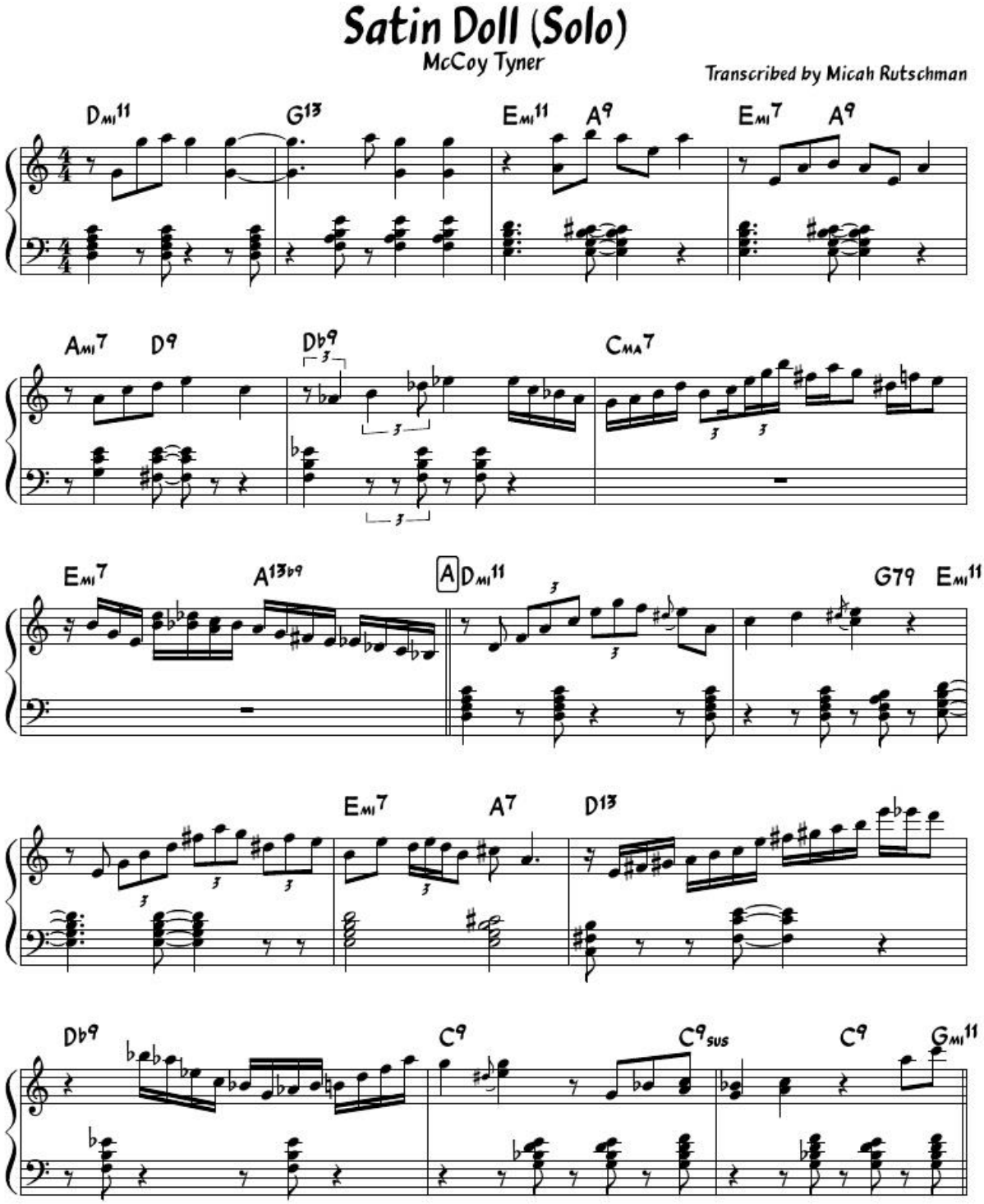
Tyner also uses block chords for the entire bridge of his second chorus (mm. 49-56). This particular excerpt demonstrates how Tyner's block chord approach is unconventional. In measure 49, he uses closed position voicings. Although his note choices are slightly different from typical “locked

hands" chords, the voices in both of his hands do move in the same direction. In measure 50, he repeats one chord voicing in his left hand while playing a single note melody in his right hand, moving away from parallel motion in his voicings. In measures 51-52, he uses quartal voicings. Tyner then uses thick altered dominant voicings in measure 53, and in measures 54-56 switches to an approach similar to Red Garland's (see fig. 85). Tyner's ability to combine all of these chordal approaches within the same section is remarkable, and it makes it clear that a performer does not need to commit to just one chordal approach. A full transcription of Tyner's solo from *Satin Doll* is included on the following pages.

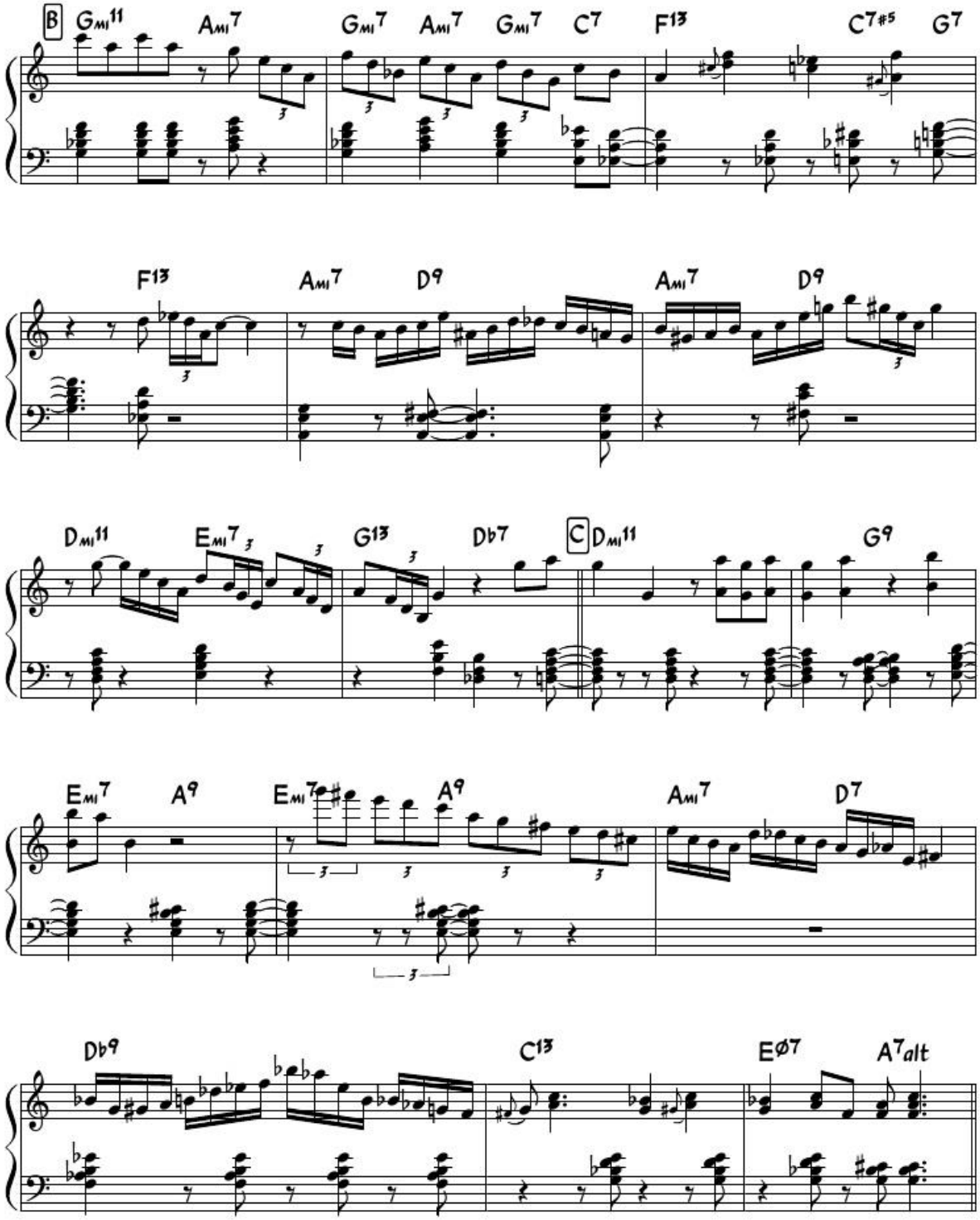
Fig. 85: Tyner combines more than one block chord technique in measures 49-56 of his solo in Satin Doll.



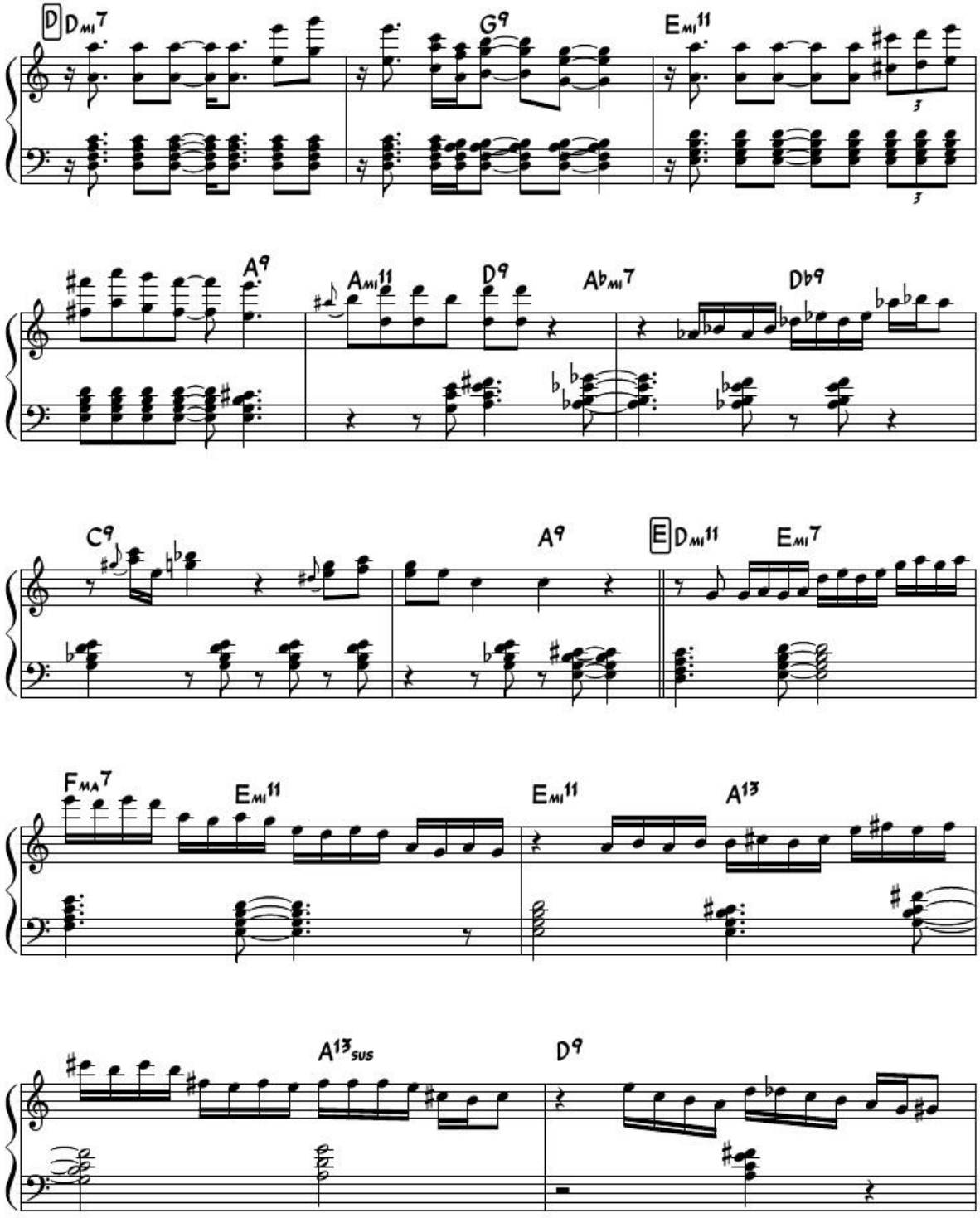
Example 11: Transcription of McCoy Tyner's solo on Satin Doll.



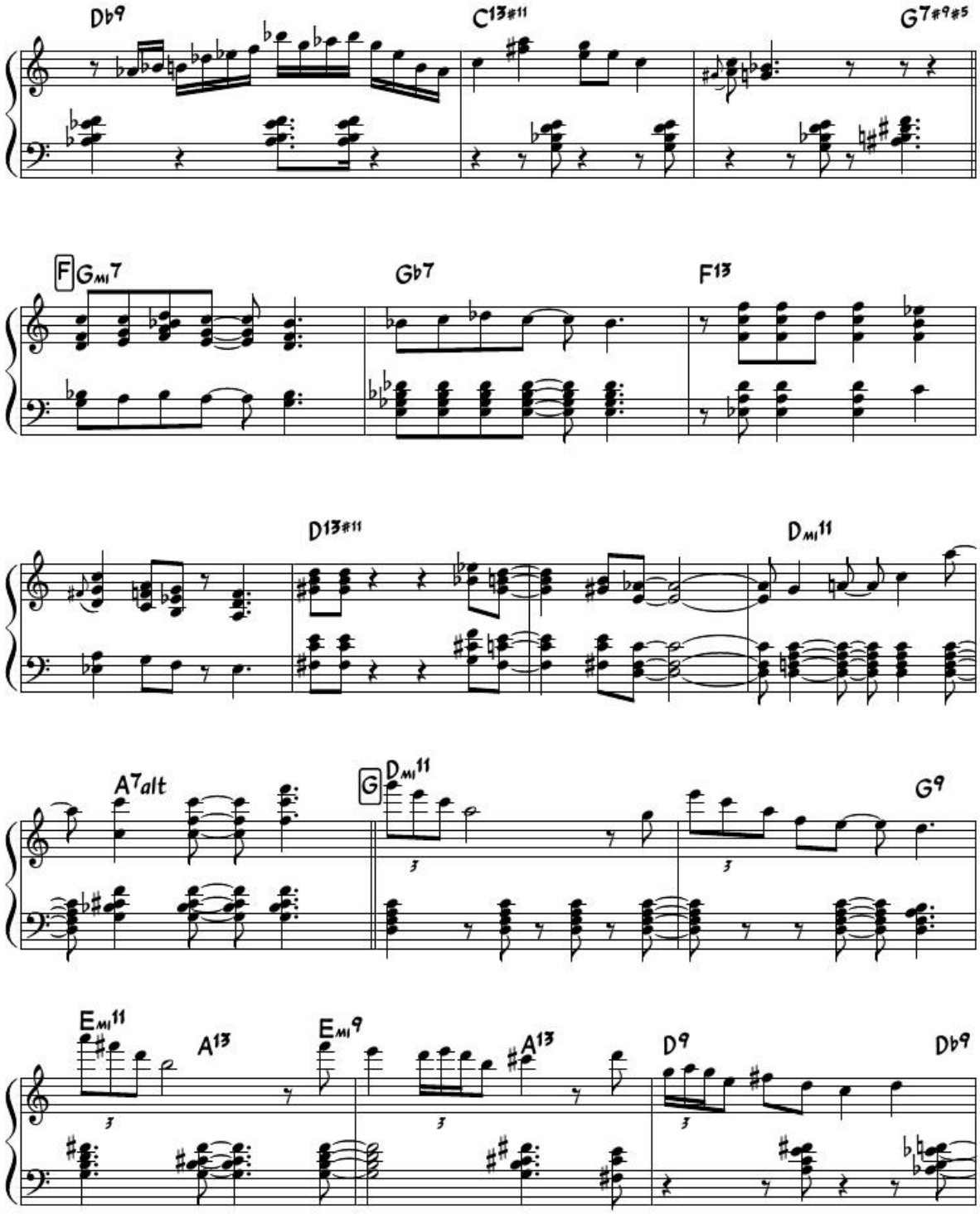
Example 11 (cont.)



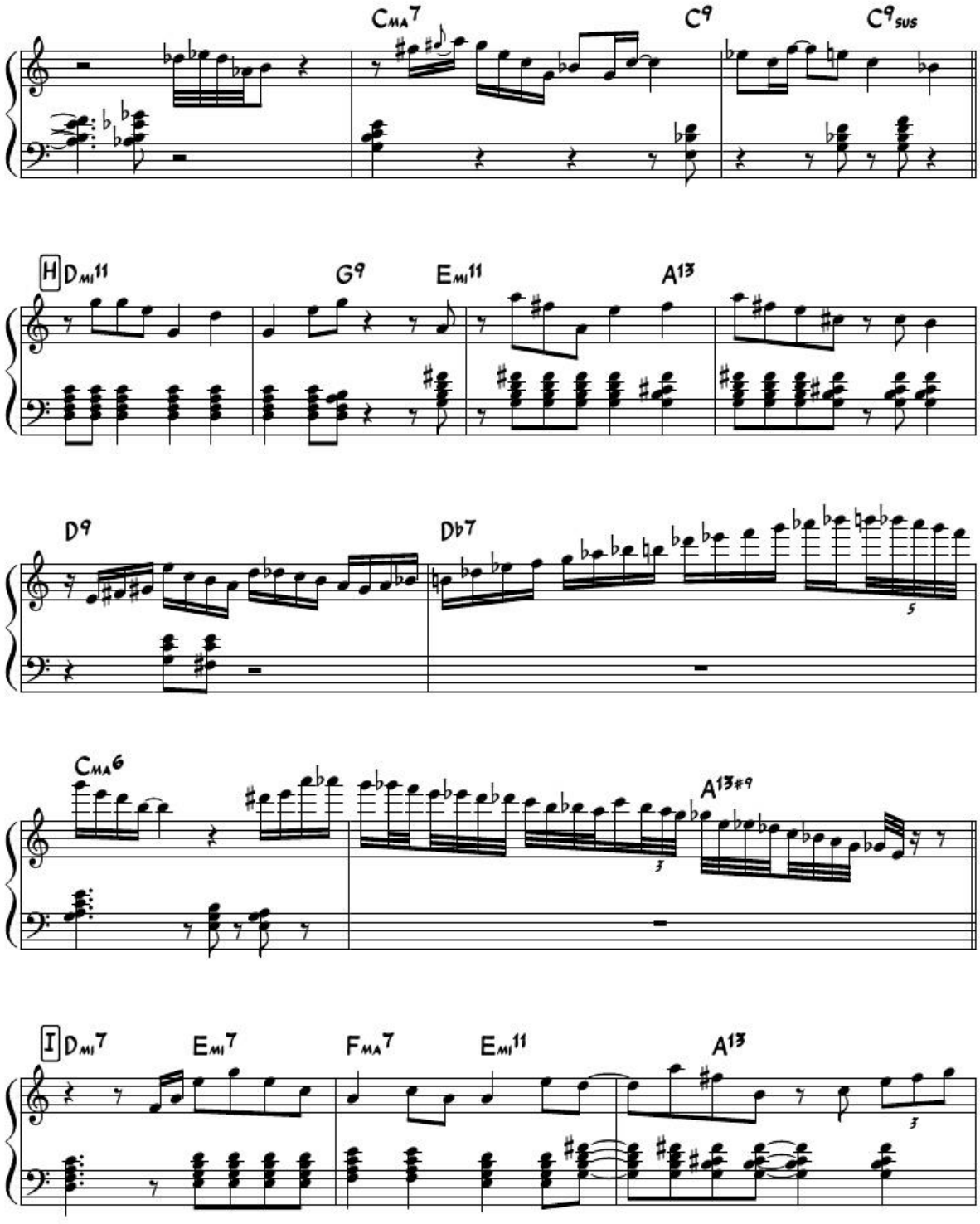
Example 11 (cont.)



Example 11 (cont.)



Example 11 (cont.)



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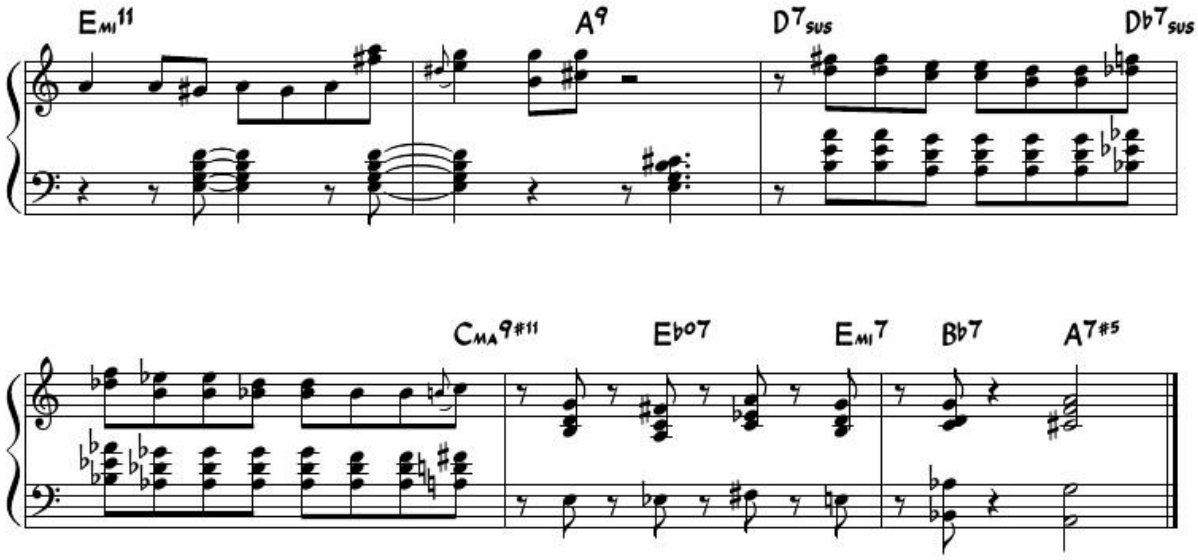


4.6.1 VIBRAPHONE ADAPTATION OF MCCOY TYNER'S SOLO ON SATIN DOLL

McCoy Tyner's uses a wide variety of voicing choices in his block chord playing on *Satin Doll*. While many of the voicings are similar to ones that we have seen used by other pianists, Tyner uses quartal voicings, which have not been used by the other pianists that we have studied. An example of this can be seen in measures 93-94 of his solo (see fig. 86). Tyner builds five-note voicings by stacking 4^{ths}, with a major 3rd in the top voices in some cases. To adapt these voicing to the vibraphone, we must omit a note. Leaving out the lowest voice works well (see fig. 87). A full vibraphone adaptation of Tyner's solo is included on the following pages.

Fig. 86: Tyner's use of quartal voicings in his solo on Satin Doll (mm. 93-94).

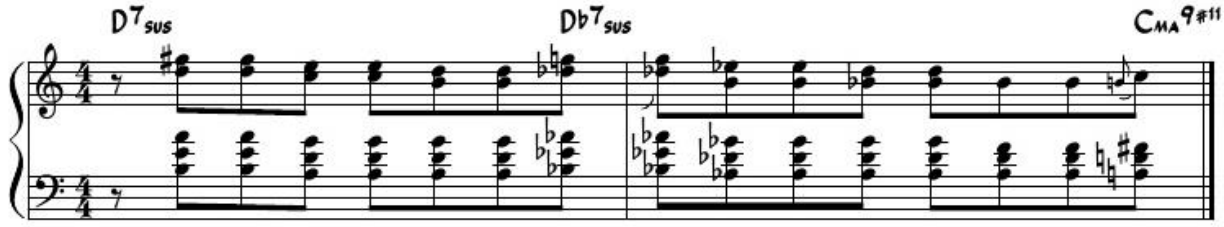
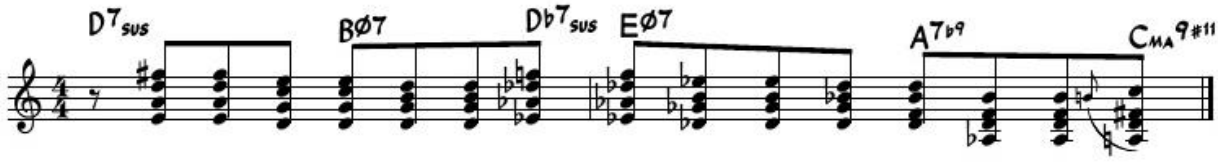
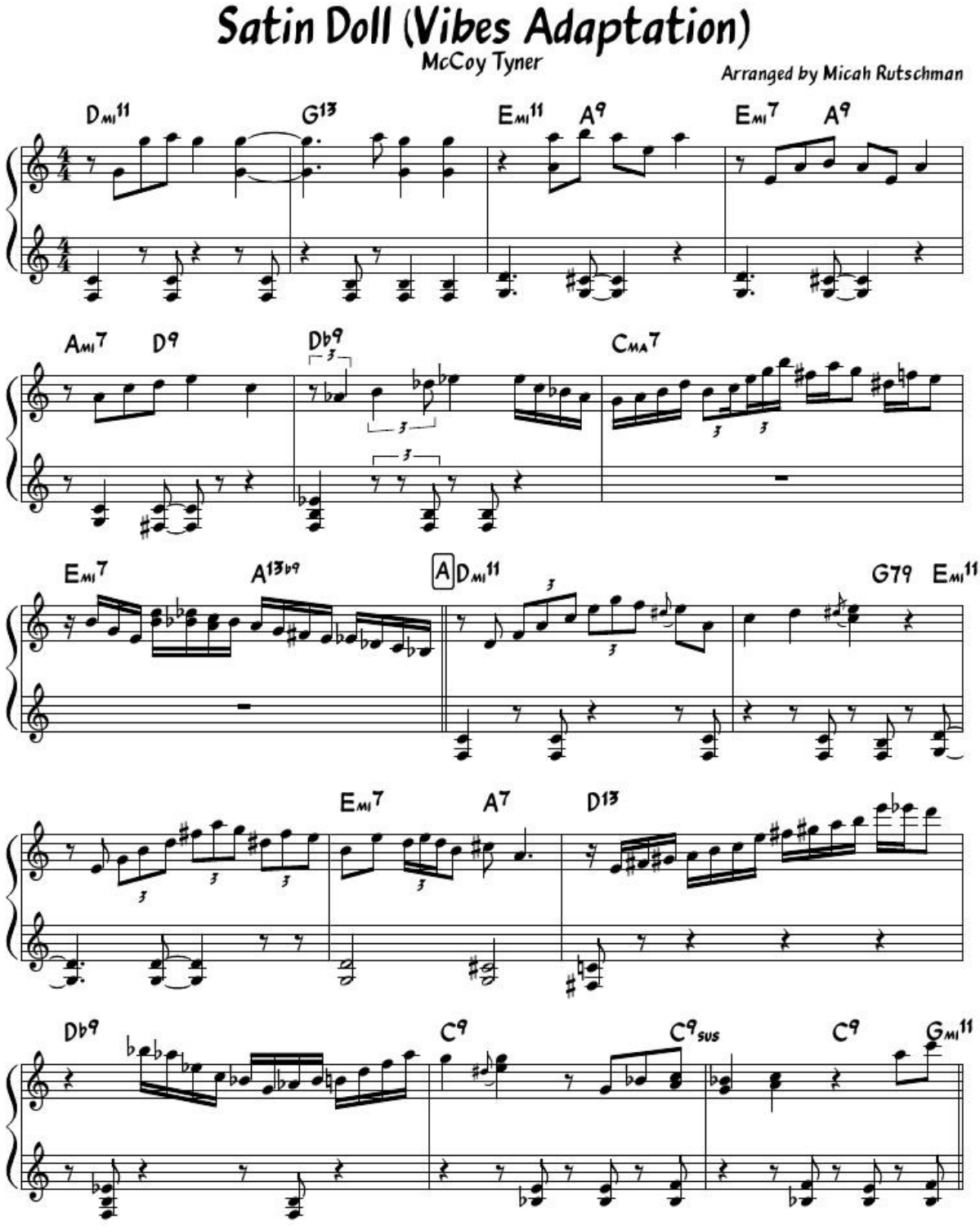


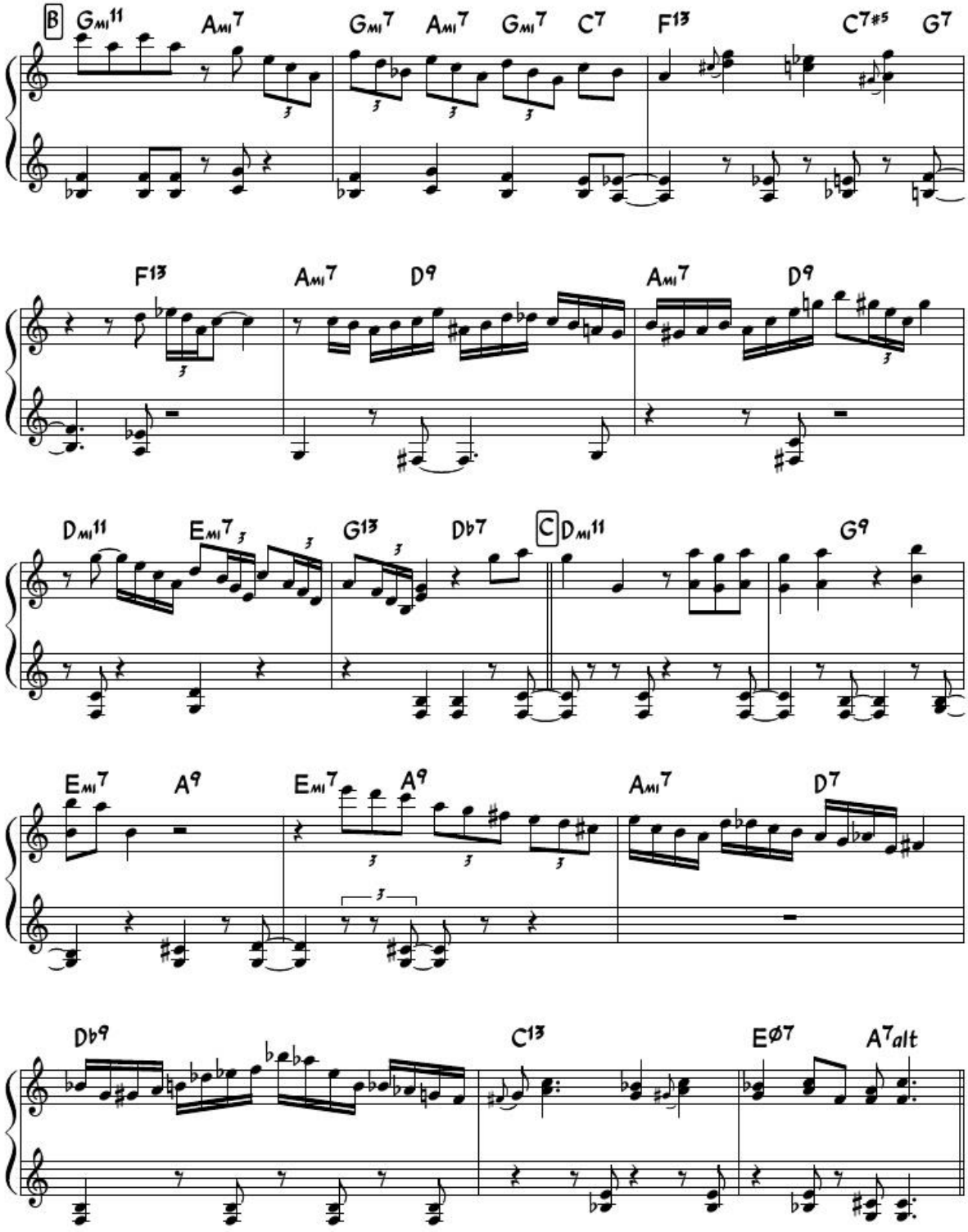
Fig. 87: Vibraphone adaptation of measures 93-94 with the lowest voice omitted.



Example 12: Vibes adaptation of McCoy Tyner's solo on Satin Doll.



Example 12 (cont.)



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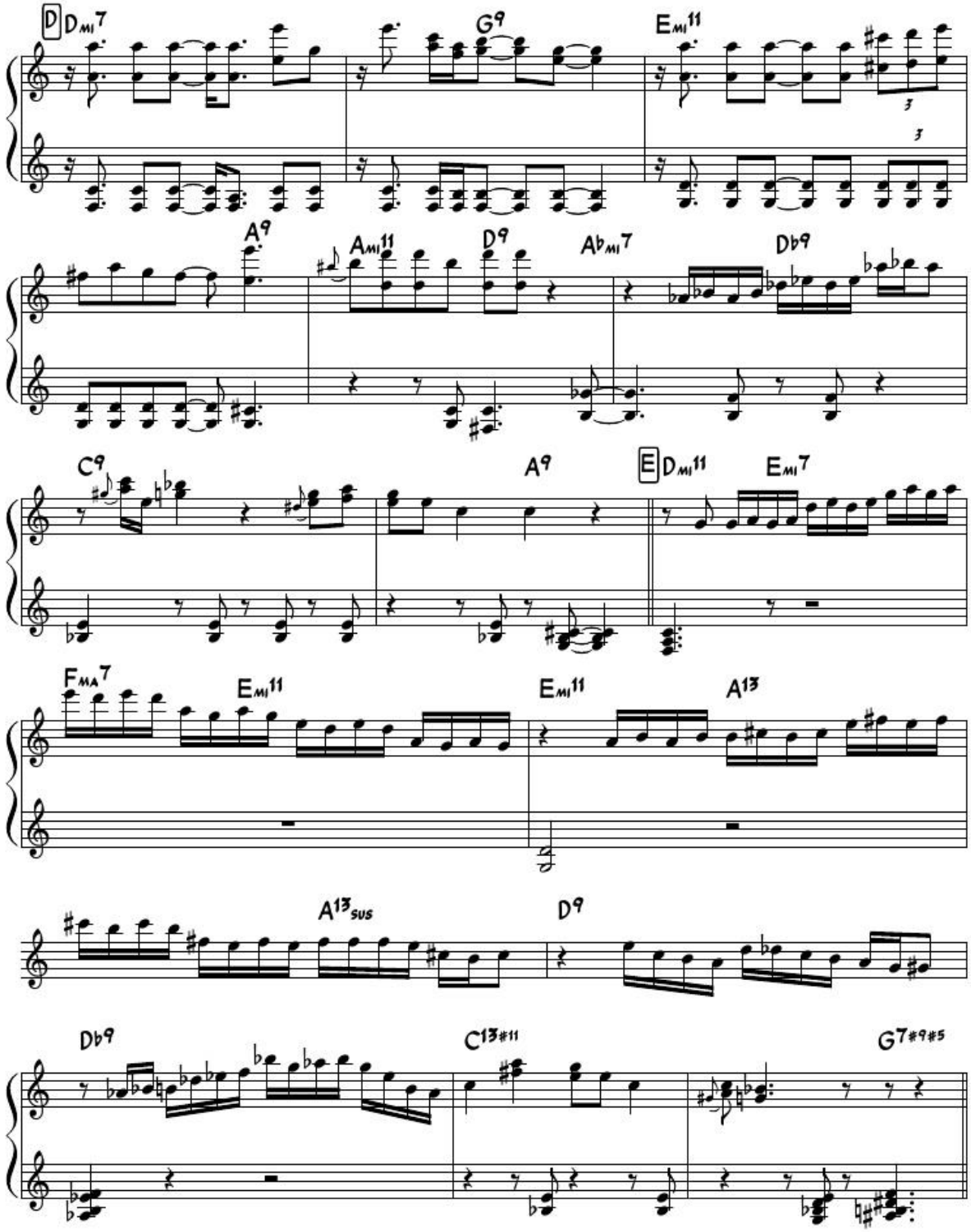
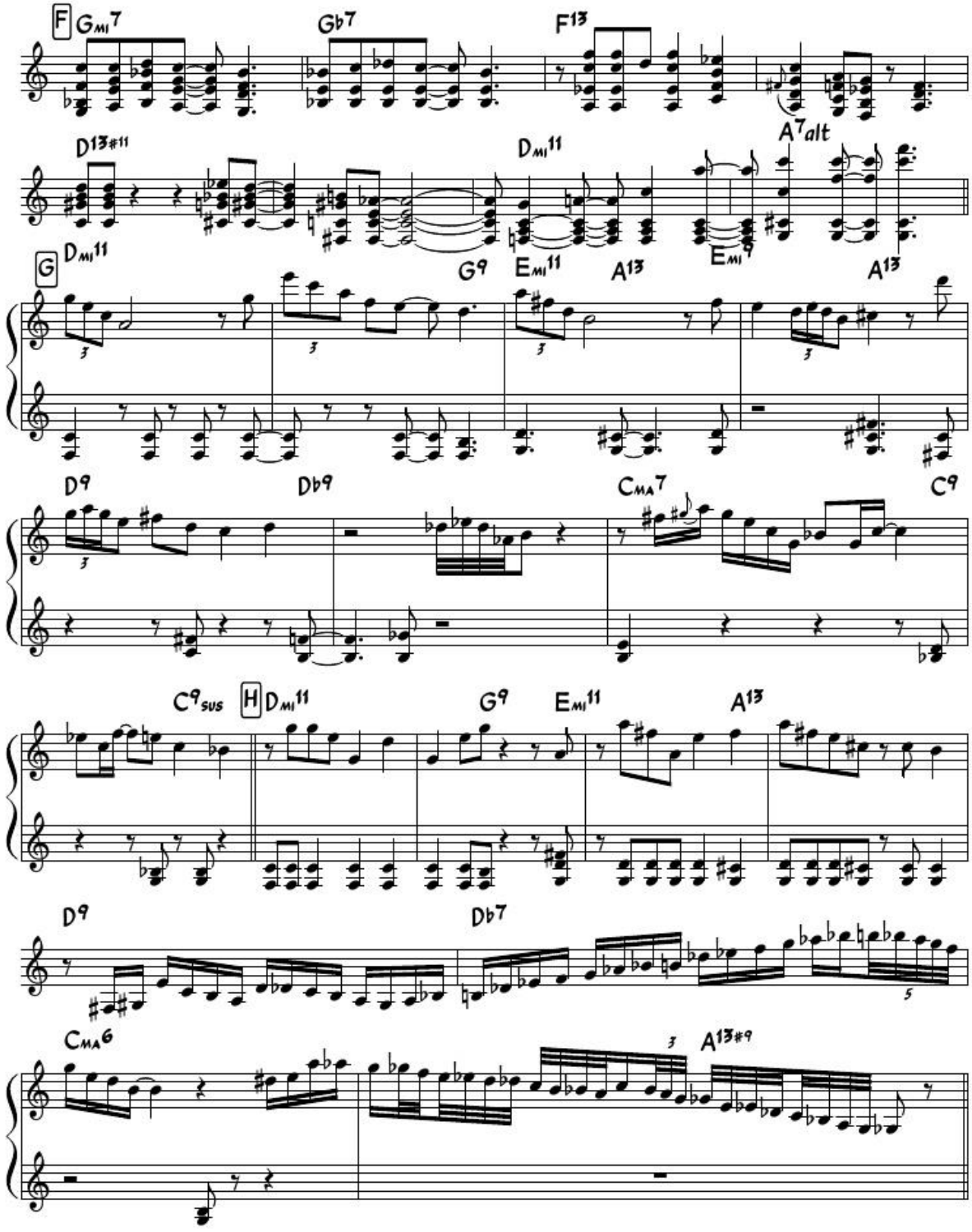


Example 12 (cont.)



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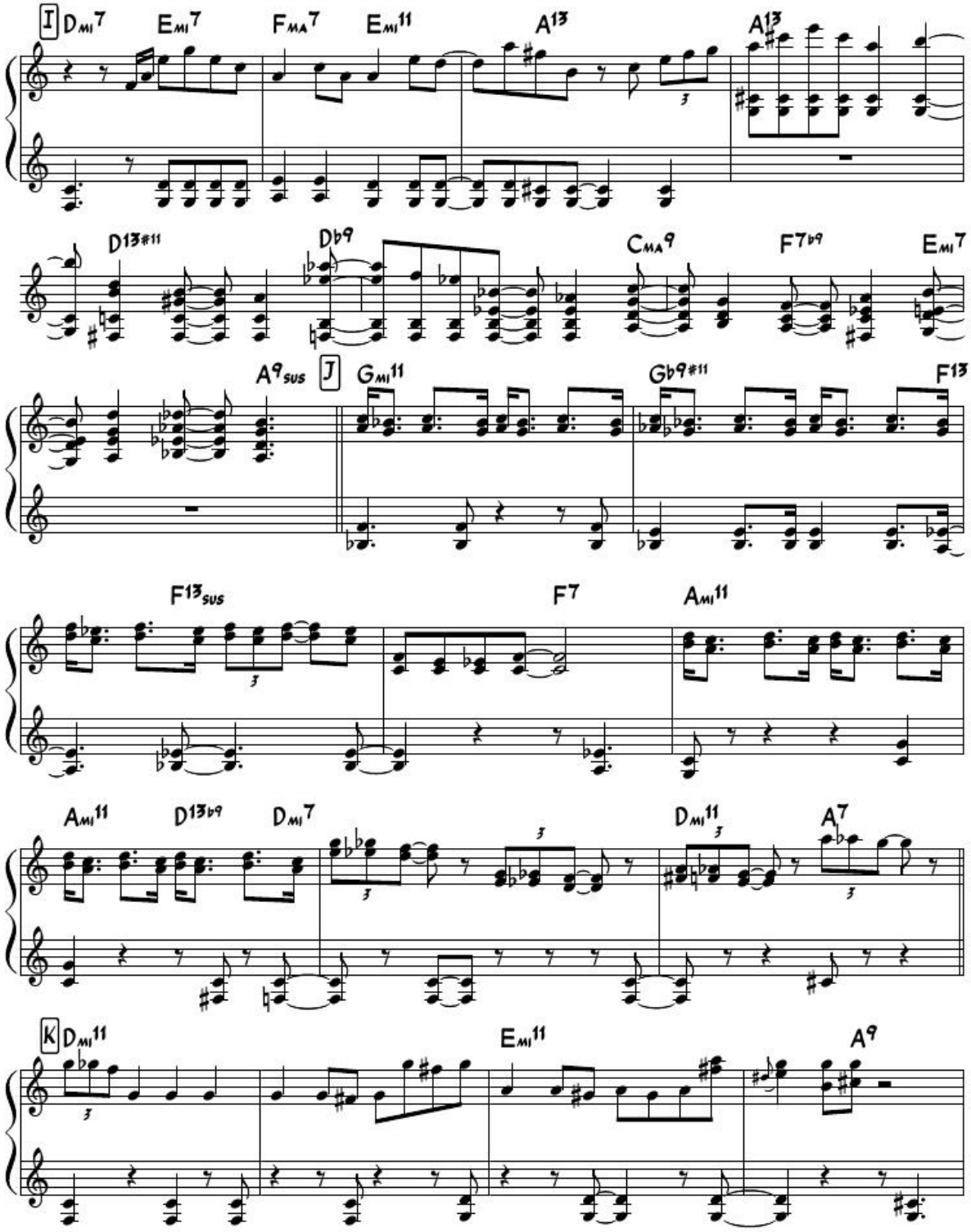
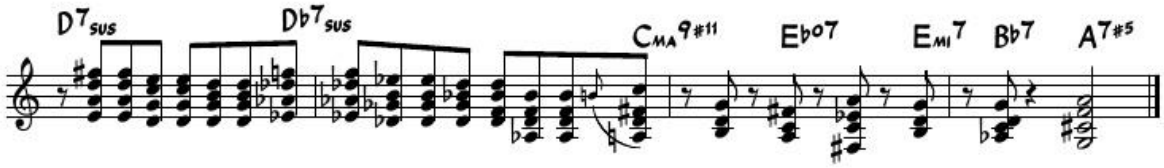


Example 12 (cont.)

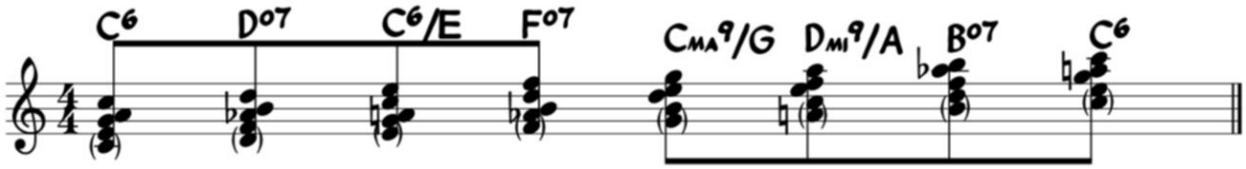


CHAPTER 5: APPLYING WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED: MELODIC DRIVEN CHORDAL CONCEPTS

5.1 THE "LOCKED HANDS" STYLE

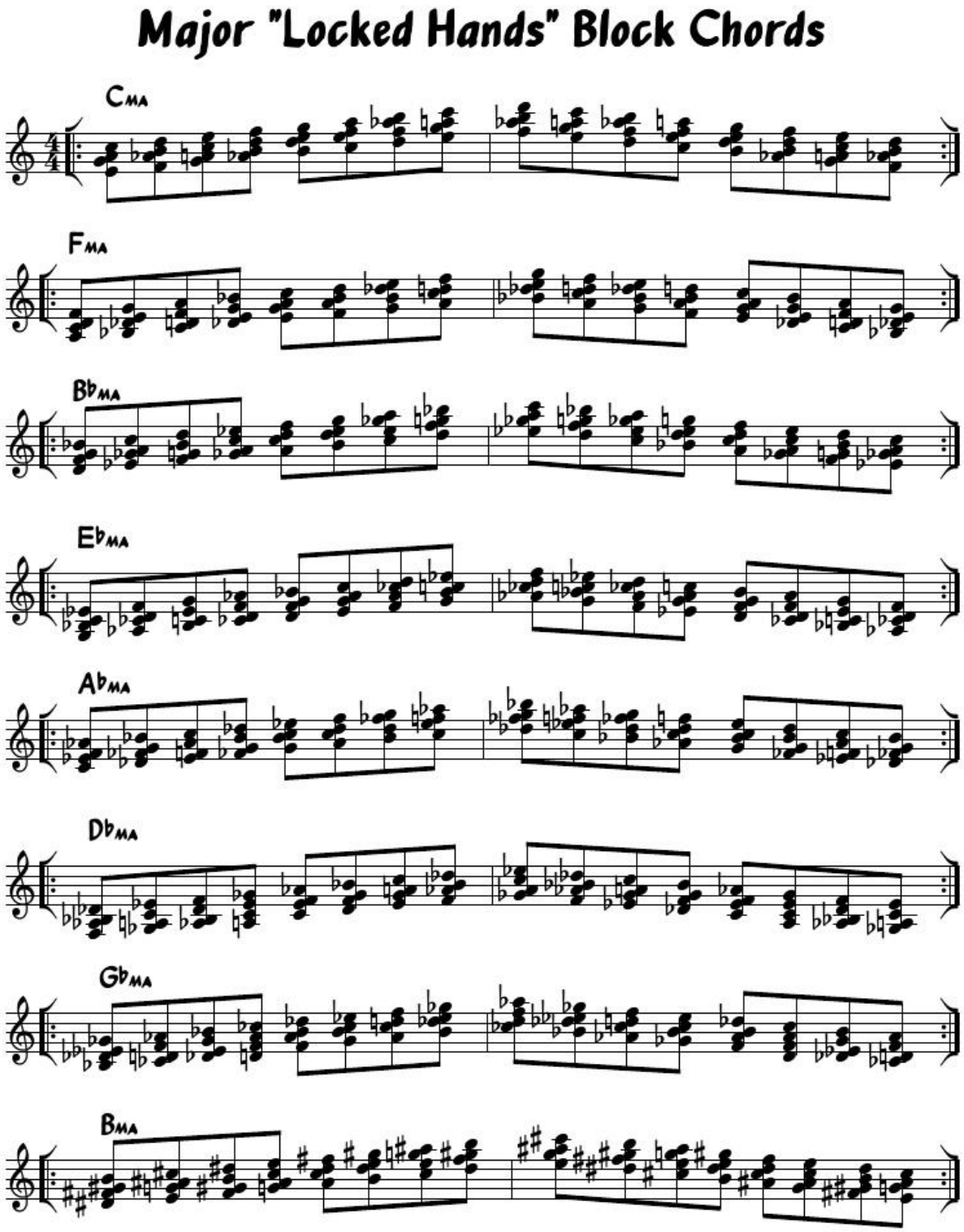
As we have learned, the "locked hands" style of block chord playing was pioneered by Milt Buckner and later popularized by George Shearing. Although pianists play a closed position voicing in their right hand while doubling the melody an octave lower, on vibraphone we must omit a note. In most cases, the best approach is to omit the lowest voice. In fig. 88, C major is harmonized using the "locked hands" style. The notes in parenthesis are notes that are excluded in our application of the technique to the vibraphone.

Fig. 88: C major harmonized using the "locked hand" approach as played on piano. The notes in parenthesis are excluded in our application of this technique to the vibraphone.

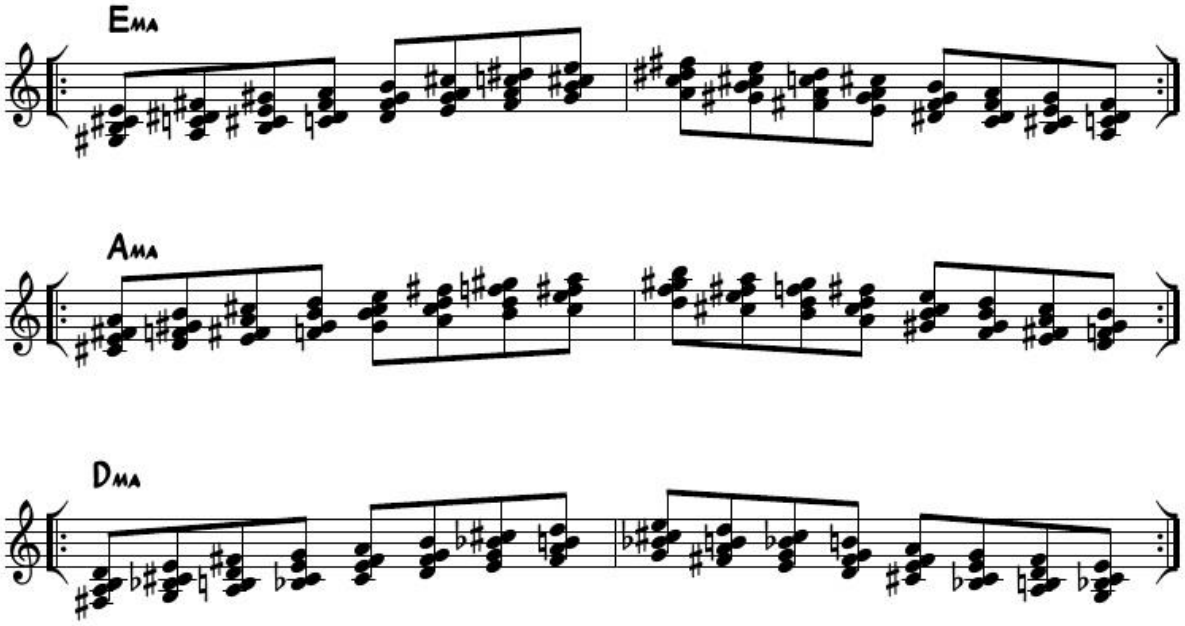


As we have seen in the solos discussed in the previous chapters, diminished 7th passing chords are often used in the "locked hands" style. Their use creates harmonic movement, which provides a more interesting sound. Harmonizations for both major and minor scales using diminished 7th passing chords are included on the following pages. There is also a minor pentatonic scale "locked hands" exercise, as pianists such as Milt Buckner would incorporate pentatonic block chord phrases in their playing. Practice these exercises with a metronome at ♩=30 bpm. Gradually increase your speed and work towards increasing your fastest comfortable tempo.

Exercise 22: Major scales harmonized using the "locked hands" approach with diminished 7th passing chords.



Exercise 22 (cont.)



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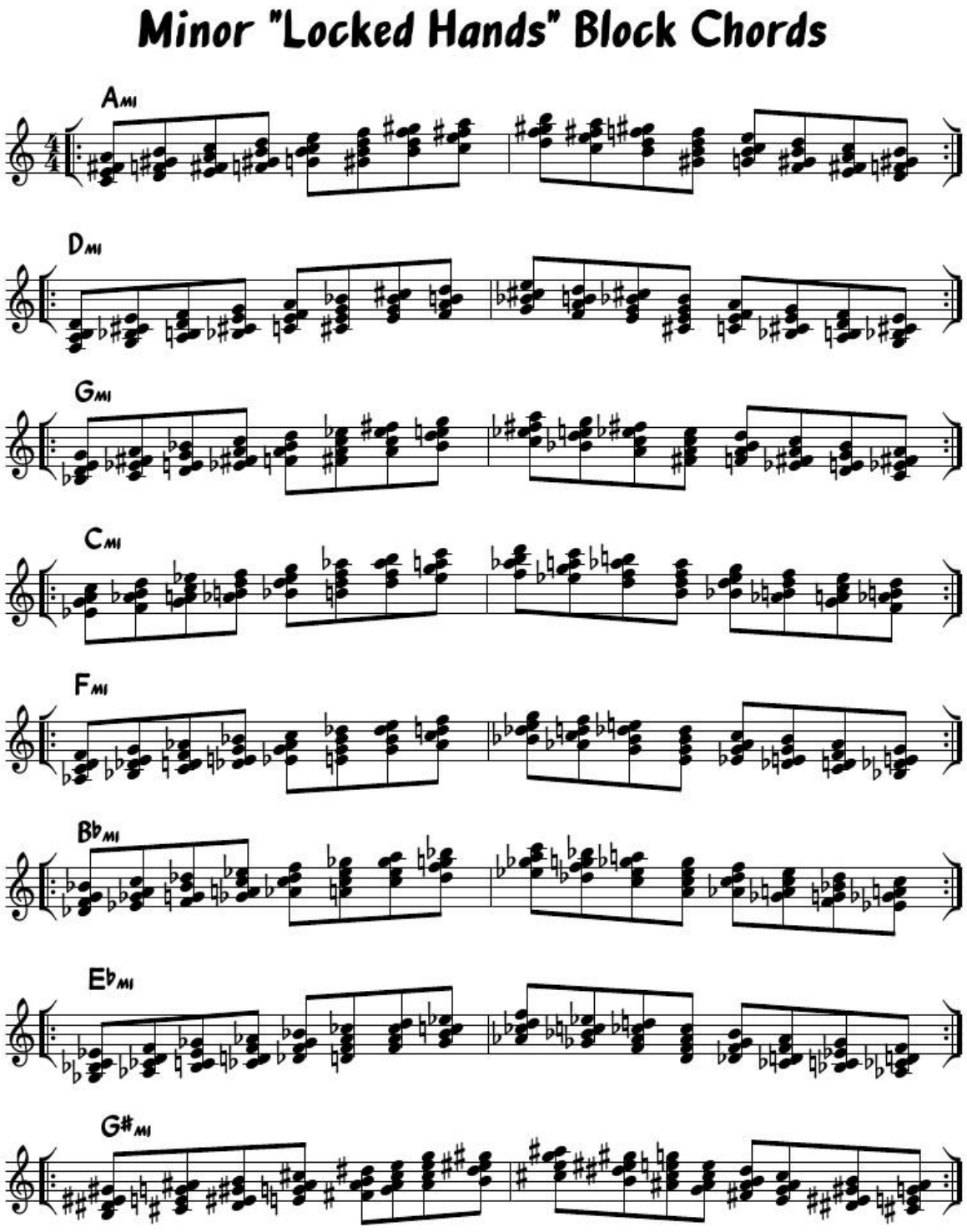
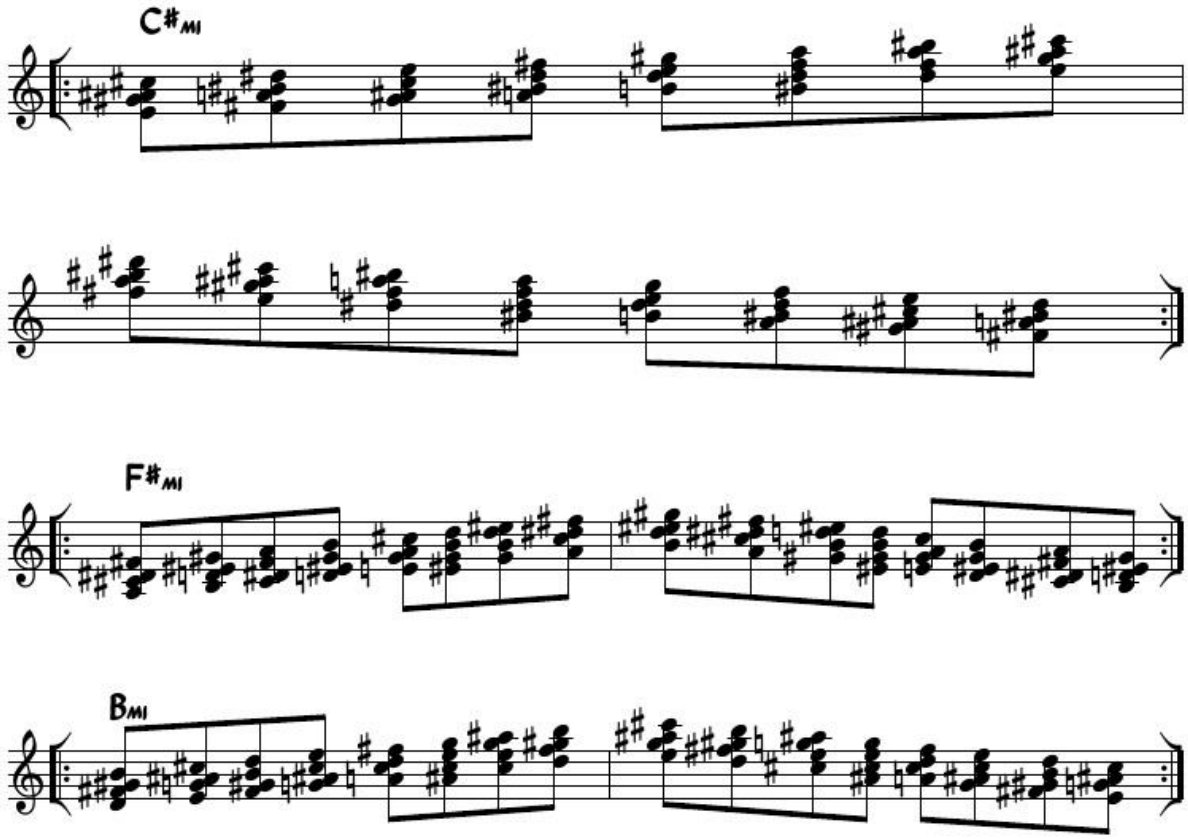
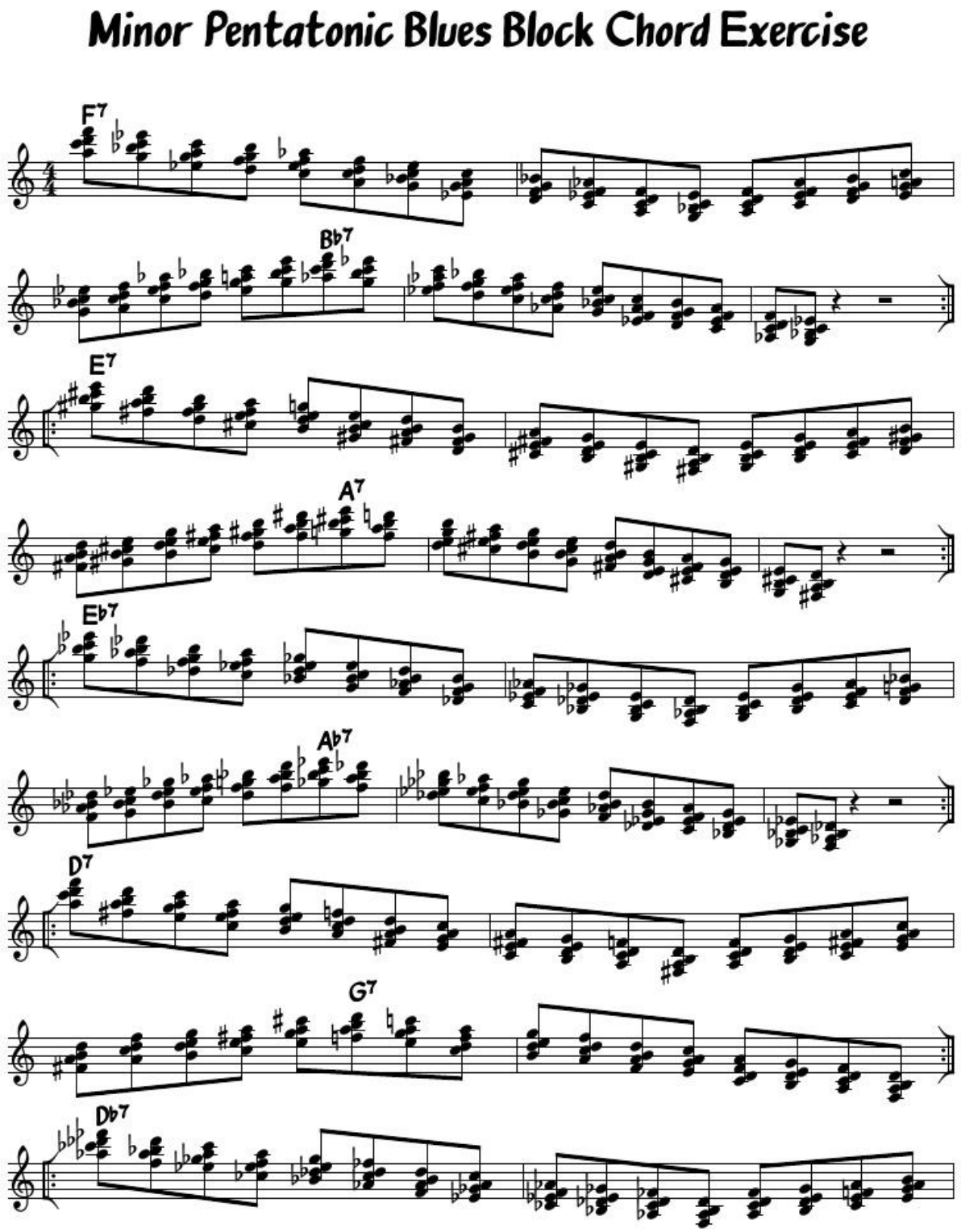
Exercise 23: Minor scales harmonized using the "locked hands" approach with diminished 7th passing chords.



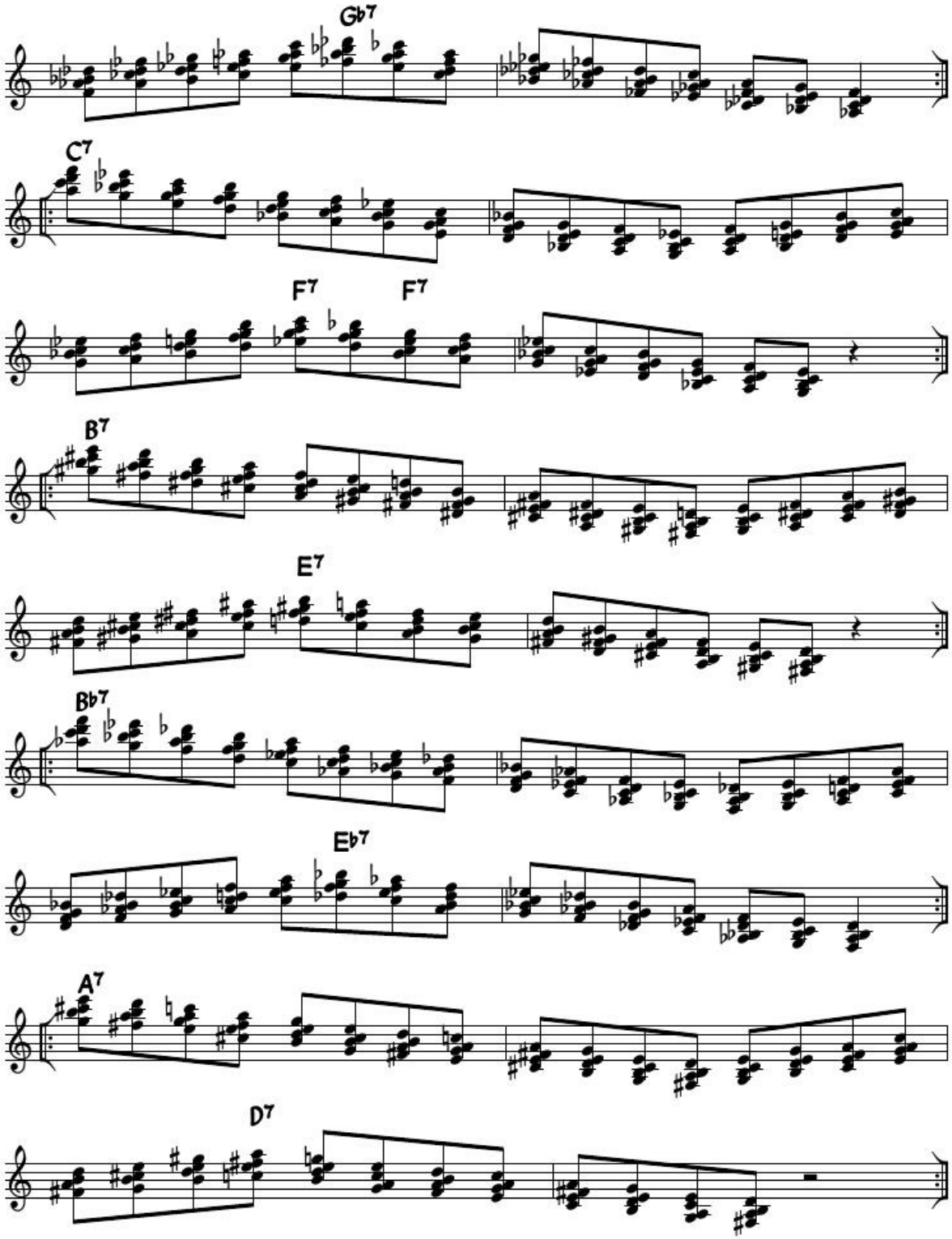
Exercise 23 (cont.)



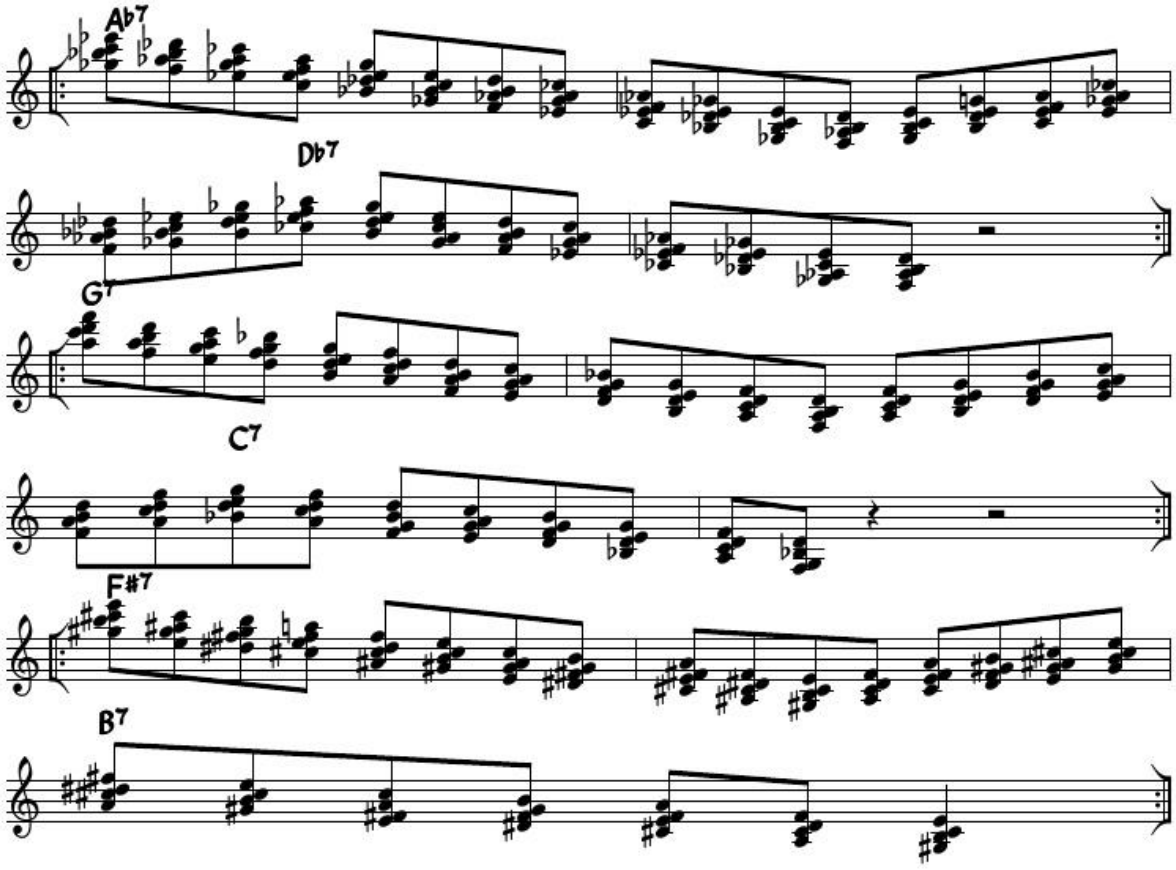
Exercise 24: Minor pentatonic scale "locked hands" exercise.



Exercise 24 (cont.)



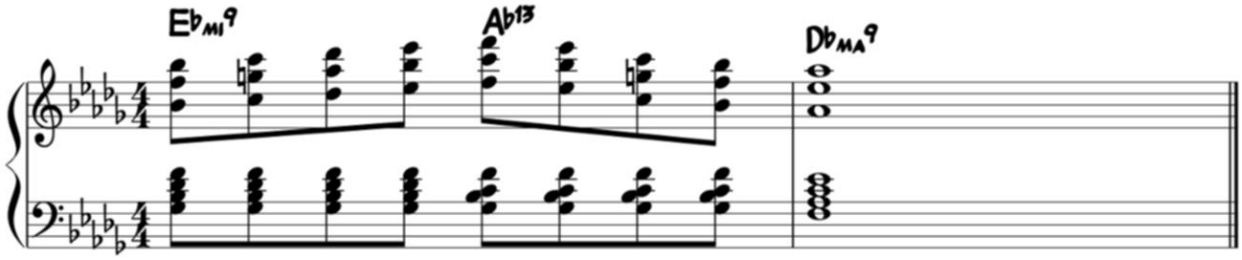
Exercise 24 (cont.)



5.2 RED GARLAND AND HIS DISTINCTIVE BLOCK CHORD STYLE

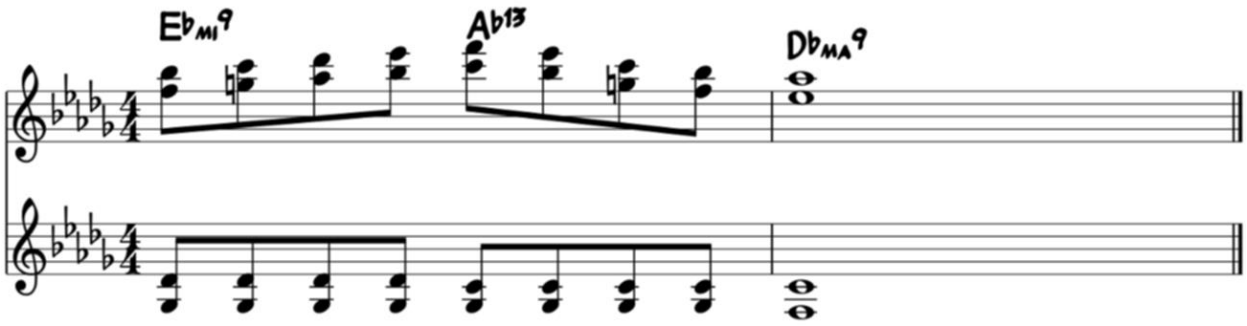
As we have learned, Red Garland popularized a style of block chord playing on piano wherein a closed position rootless chord is played in the left hand, while the right hand plays the melody in octaves, along with a note between the voices a perfect 4th below the highest voice. Red Garland would move this three-note shape around in his right hand, while his left hand played in rhythmic unison (see fig. 89). Note that with this style of playing, the right hand occasionally plays notes that are "wrong" from a harmonic standpoint.

Fig. 89: An example of Red Garland's block chord style. Notice the G natural, a "wrong note" is played in the right hand over Ebmin9 and Ab13.



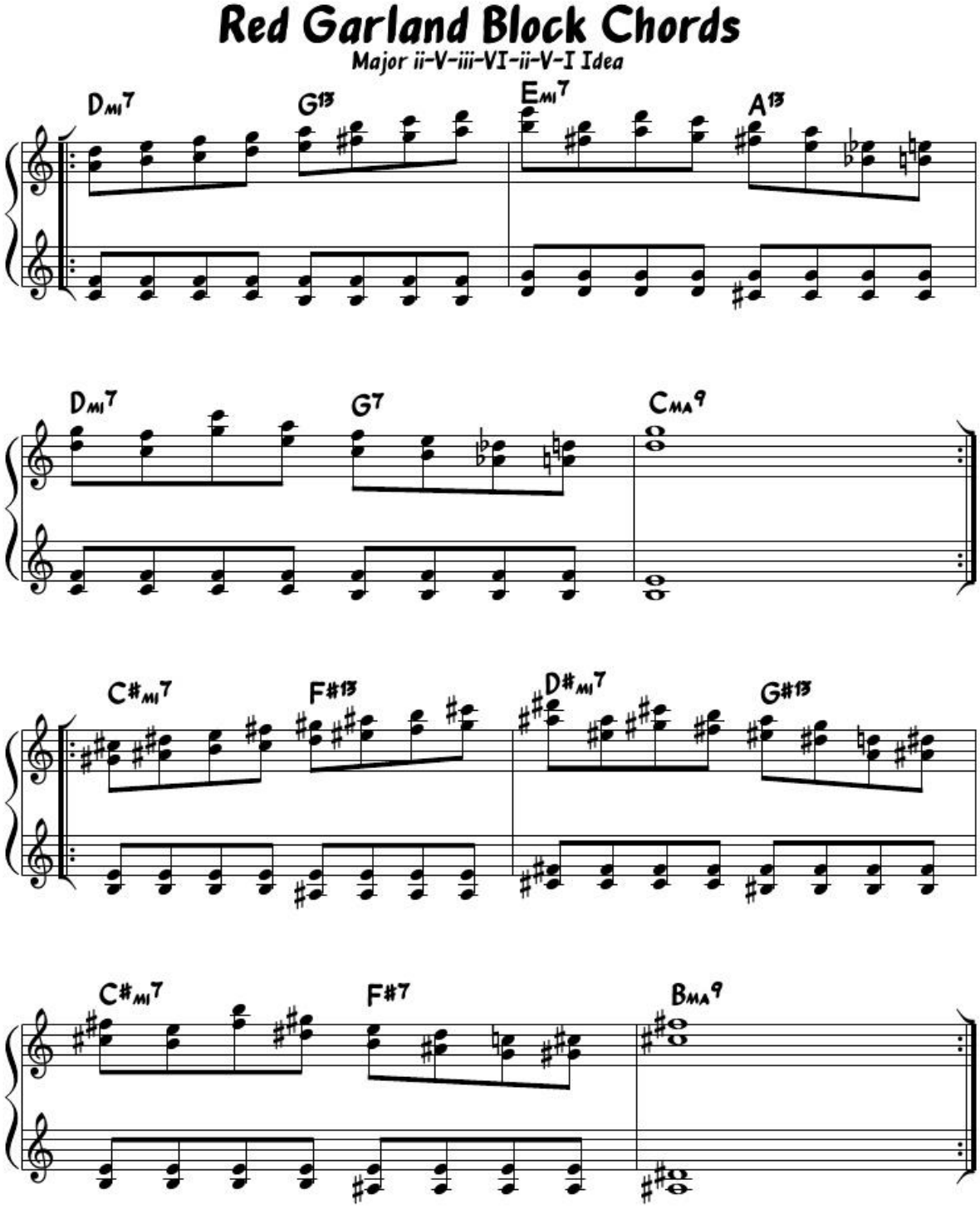
Since we are not capable of playing 7 notes simultaneously on the vibraphone, as with the "locked hands" approach, we must omit notes from our voicings in order to apply this technique to the vibraphone. The easiest solution is to simplify the left-hand voicing, playing just the 3rds and 7ths, and omit the lowest note voiced in the right hand. What we end up with is a two-note voicing of leading tones in the left hand, and perfect 4ths in the right hand (see fig. 90). Alternatively, the middle voice in the right hand can be omitted, which creates octaves. A single note melody played in the right hand is also a viable option.

Fig. 90: Vibraphone adaptation of the Red Garland block chord example shown in fig. 89.

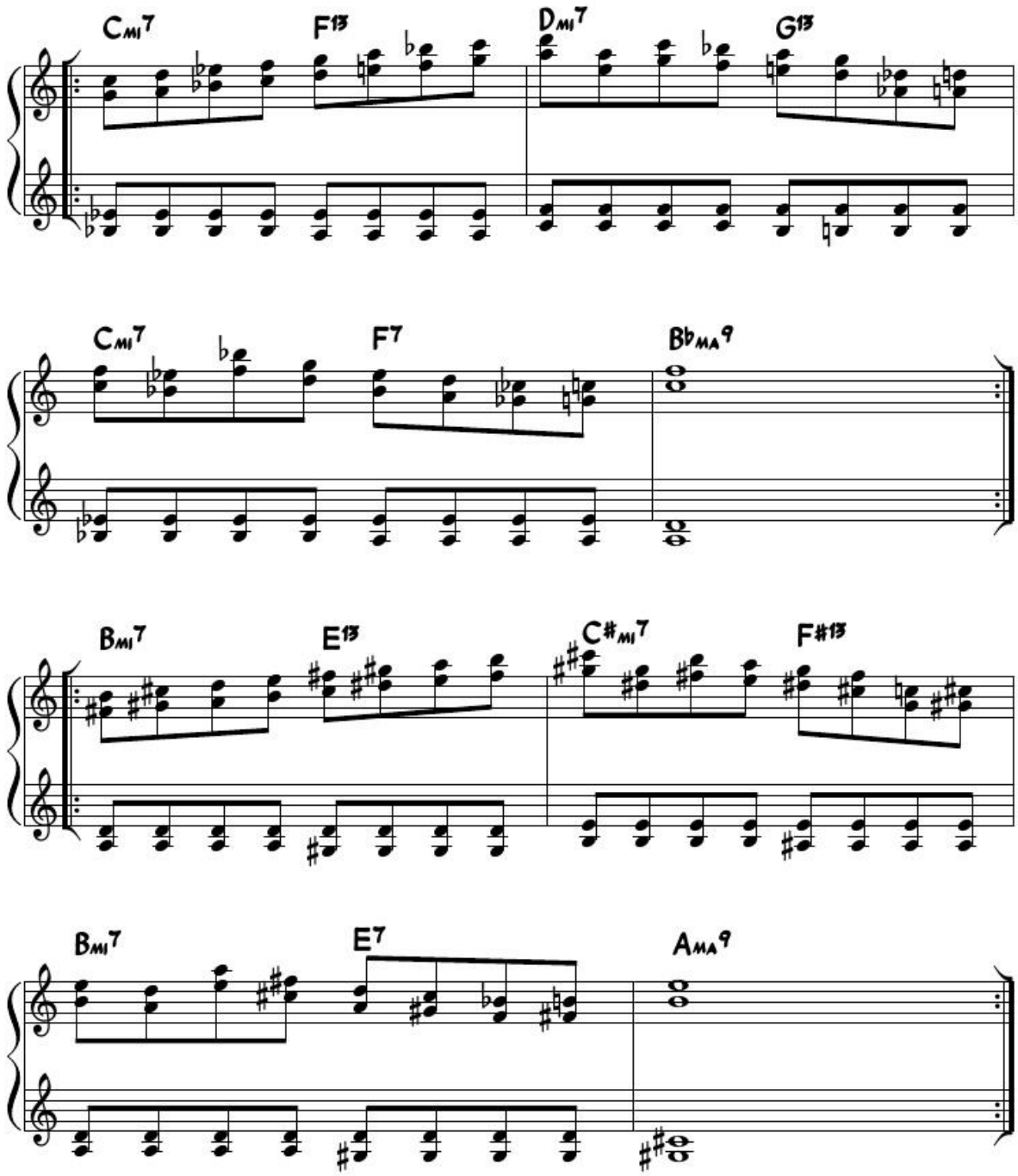


Although Red Garland played these voicings spread over a large range of the piano, because of the smaller range of the vibraphone, there will often be less distance between the right and left-hand voicings. Note that because the left-hand voicings are leading tones, these voicings are related to Drop 2 voicings. In fig. 90, if the right-hand notes were transposed down an octave, beat one of the 1st measure would be a Drop 2 voicing. With this in mind, we can apply this technique as an extension to Drop 2 voicings. In the exercises on the following pages, Garland's block chord approach is explored using Drop 2 voicings as the starting chord. Because of the limited register of the vibraphone, and in order to make full use of the instrument's range, there are different melodic ideas for the first and second halves of the exercise. Practice these with a metronome starting at ♩=30 bpm. Gradually increase your speed and work towards increasing your fastest comfortable tempo.

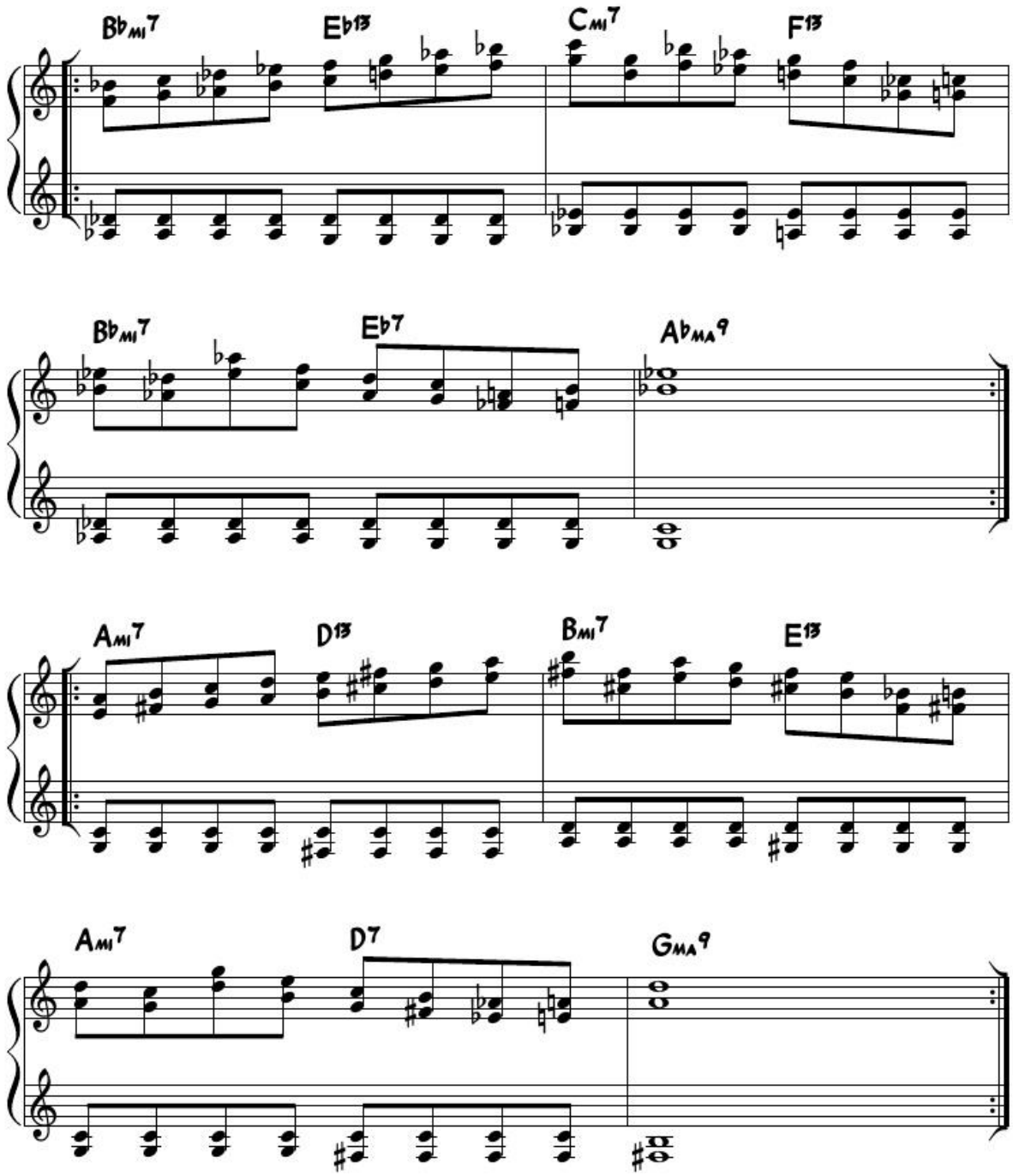
Exercise 25: Red Garland's block chord approach with perfect 4th voiced in the right hand.



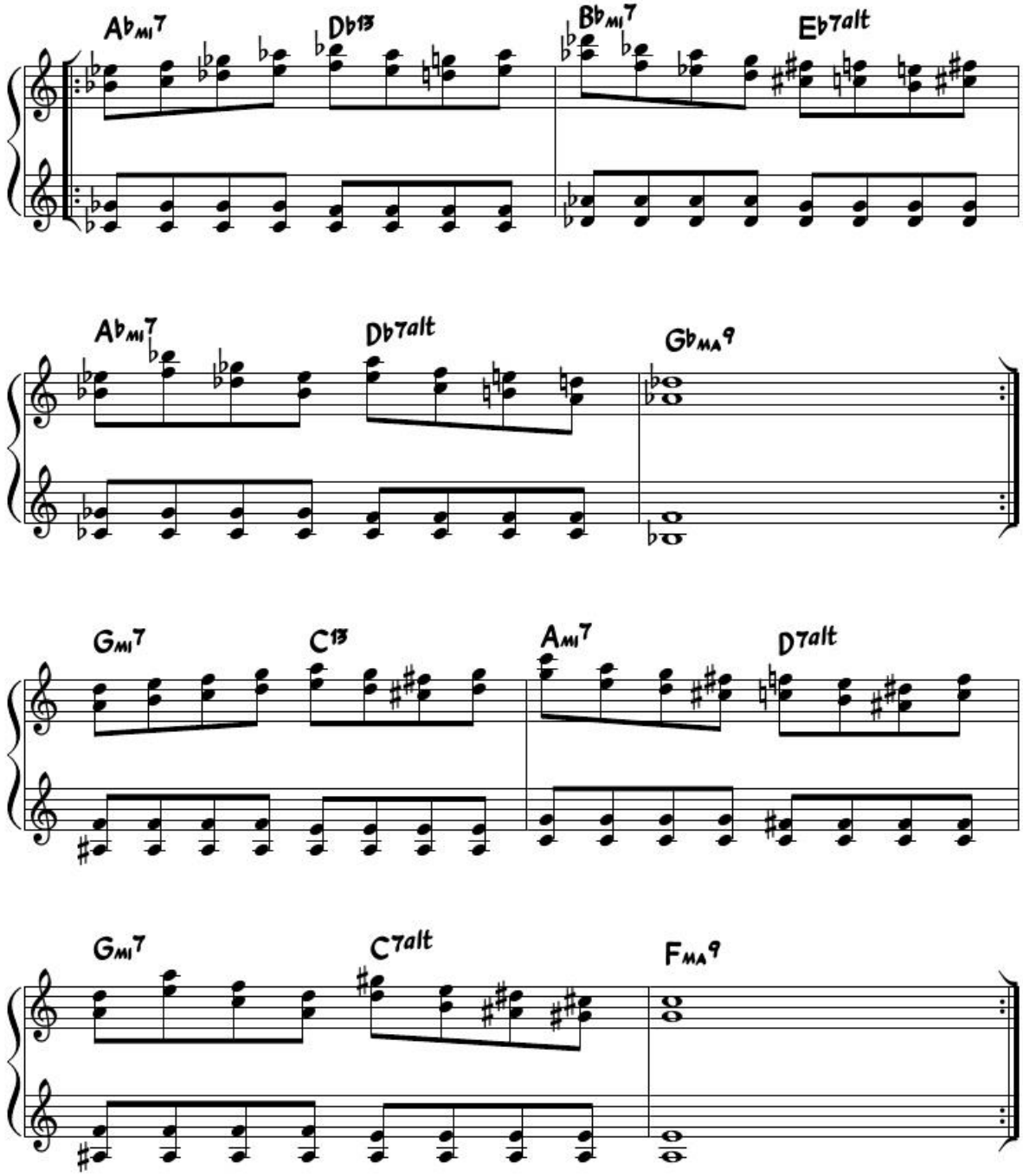
Exercise 25 (cont.)



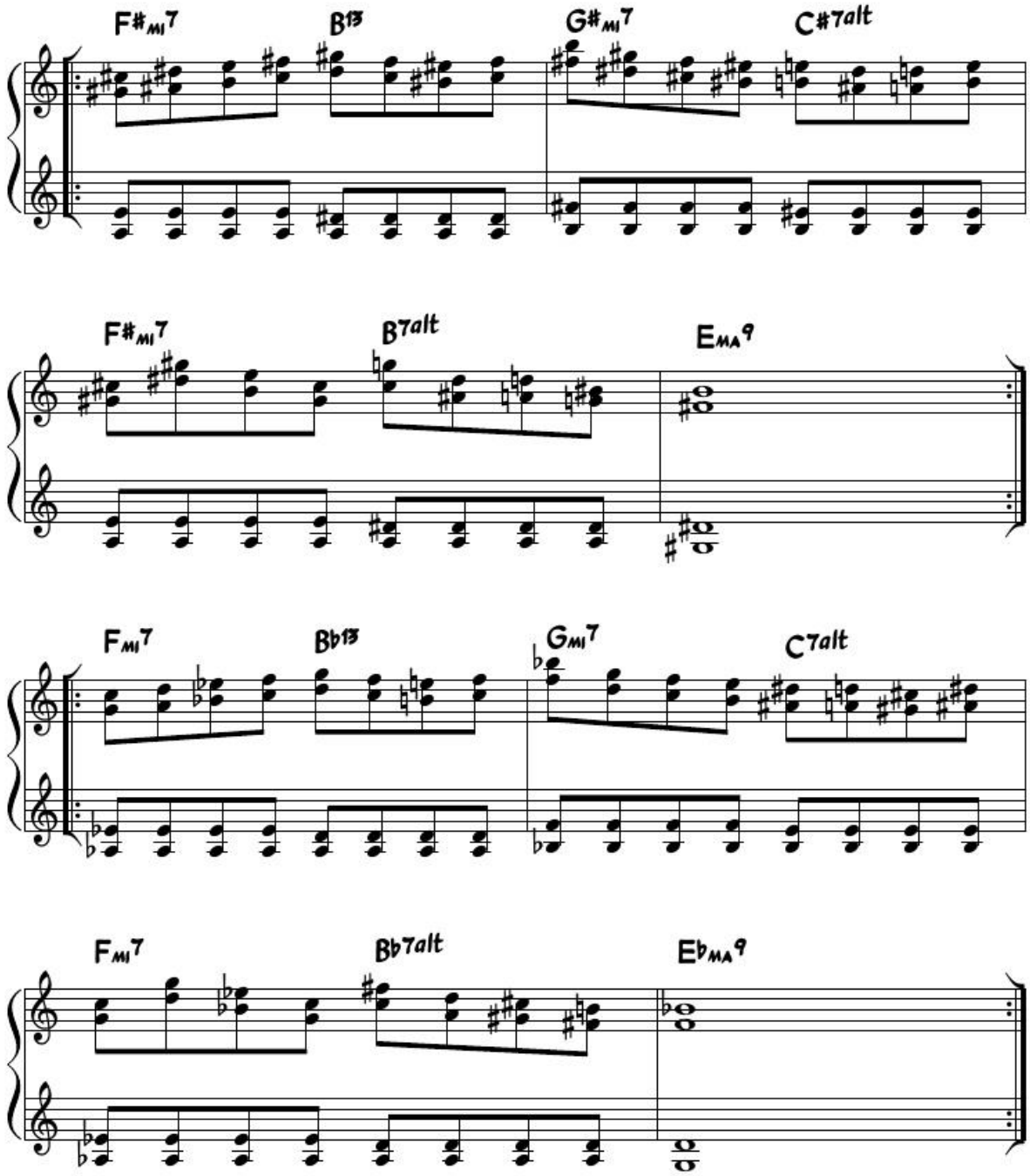
Exercise 25 (cont.)



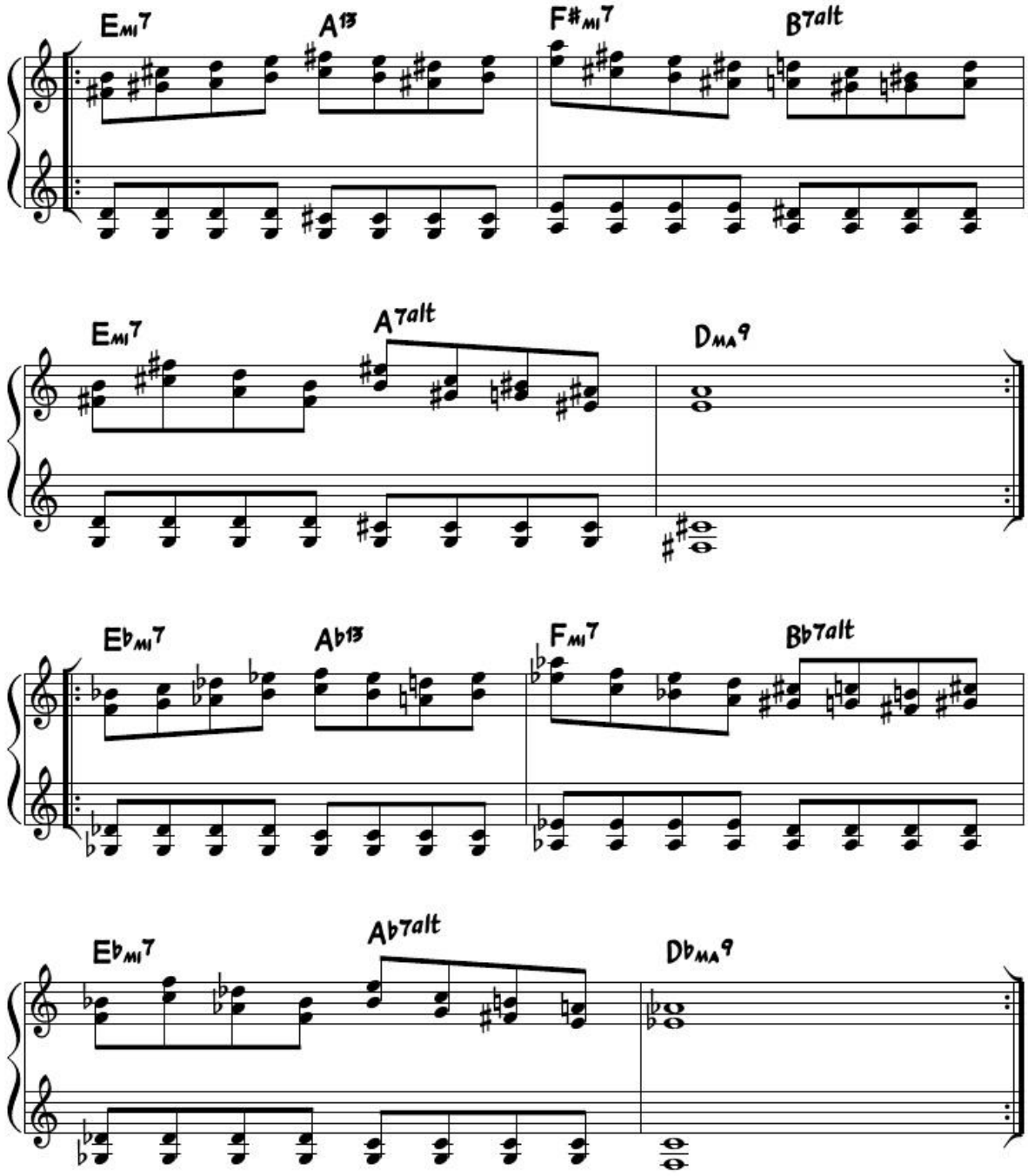
Exercise 25 (cont.)



Exercise 25 (cont.)



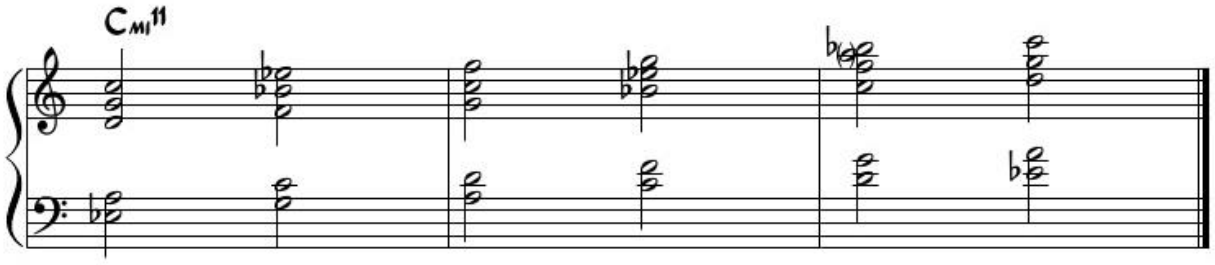
Exercise 25 (cont.)



5.3 MCCOY TYNER AND QUARTAL PLANING

McCoy Tyner popularized the use of quartal voicings in his comping as a way to generalize harmony. Quartal harmony is built using stacked fourths rather than thirds as traditional harmony does. As a result, it creates a static sound that works well in modal contexts. McCoy's two-hand voicings usually contained five notes, where the lower four notes were built using stacked perfect fourths and occasional augmented fourths, and the two highest notes created either a perfect fourth or a major third. When applying this technique to a minor chord, voicings can be built by harmonizing a minor pentatonic scale (see fig. 91). Note that the 4th voicing in this system, which is harmonizing the 5th scale degree of the C Dorian mode (G) has a major third interval between the top two voices. Additionally, the 5th voicing of this system can have either a perfect fourth between the top voicings, with the 7th scale degree on top (Bb), or alternatively, it can have a major third between the top two voices, with the 6th scale degree of the Dorian mode on top (A).

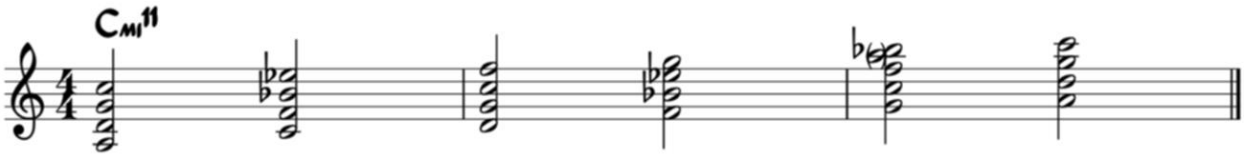
Fig. 91: Quartal voicings as played on piano for a C minor chord. Note the alternate melody note in parenthesis for the first chord of the third measure.



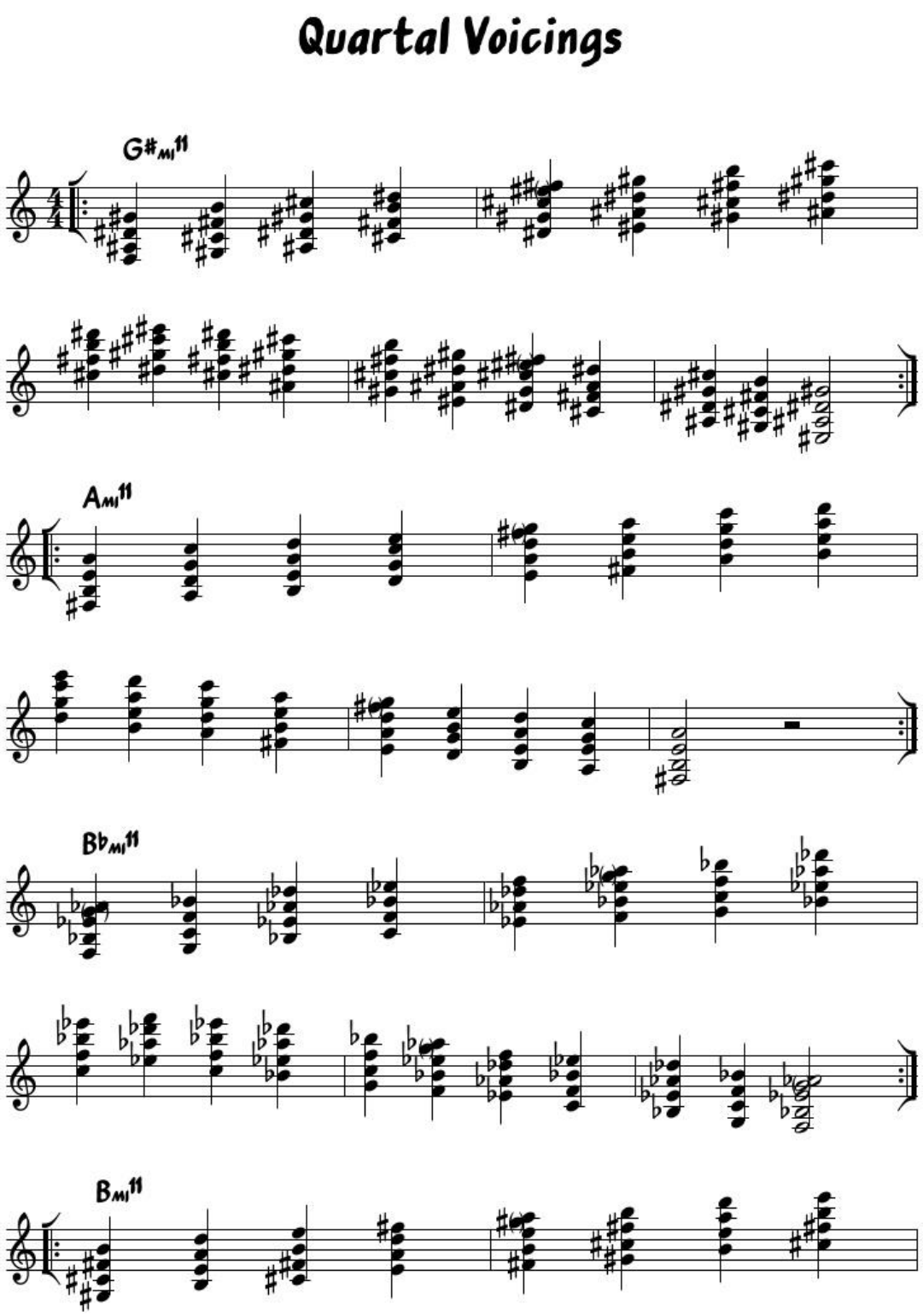
When applying this concept to the vibraphone, we can simply omit the lowest note of the voicings (see fig. 92). In practical use, this concept can be applied to major and dominant chords as well. For a major chord, you can build the voicings on the major pentatonic of the chord's root, which would be the same as a minor pentatonic built from the 6th of the chord. To apply these voicings to a dominant chord, you can build the voicings from a minor pentatonic starting on the 5th of the chord.

With major chords, this creates a Lydian sound, and with dominant chords it creates a suspended sound. In this way, the same voicings used in figs. 91-92 can be applied to both an EbMa7(#11), as well as a F7sus. In the exercise on the following pages, practice with a metronome set to ♩=30 bpm. Gradually increase your speed and work towards increasing your fastest comfortable tempo.

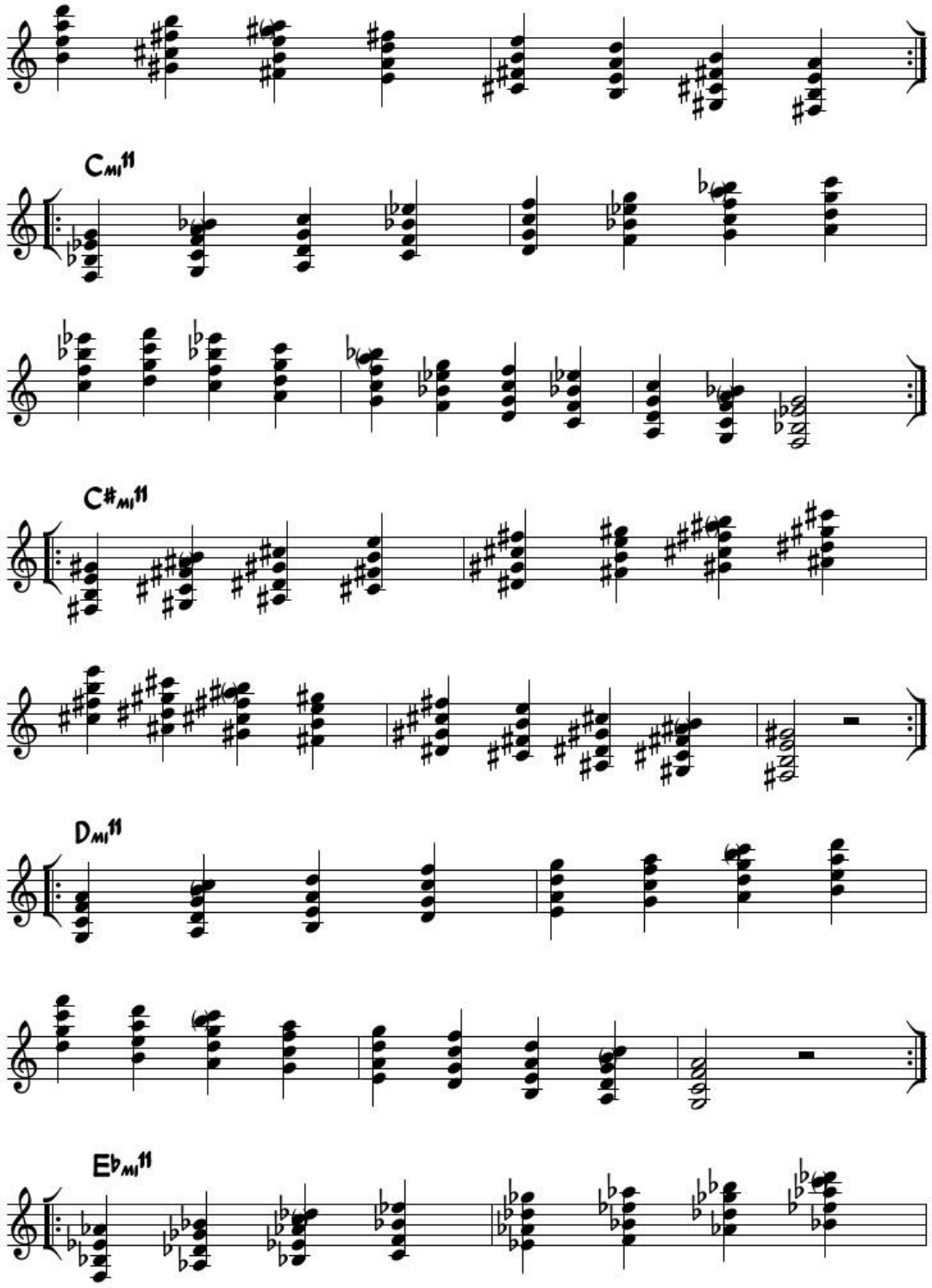
Fig. 92: Quartal voicings played for a C minor chord. These voicings can also be applied to EbMaj7(#11) and F7sus chords.



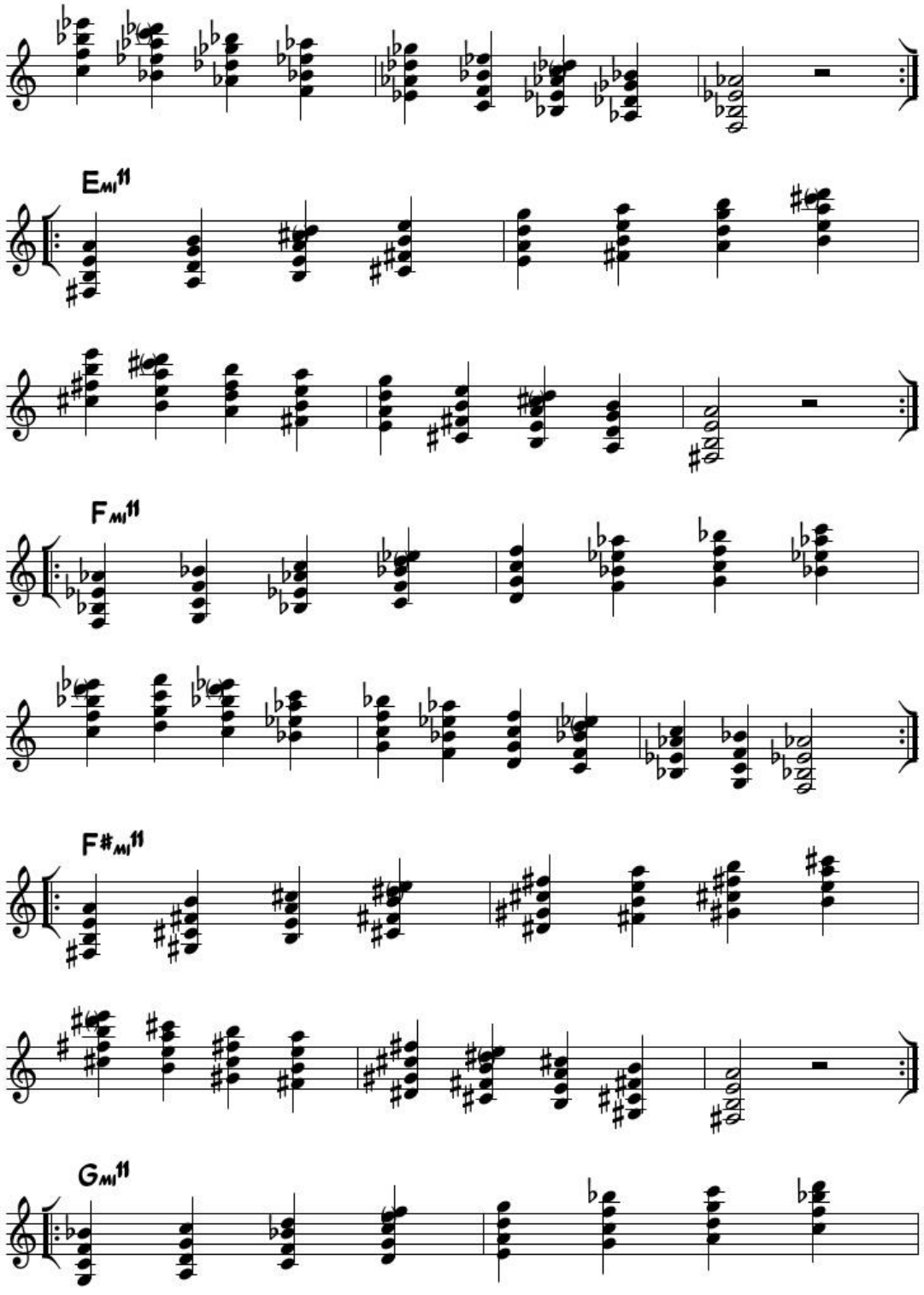
Exercise 26: McCoy Tyner's use of quartal voicings to generalize harmony.



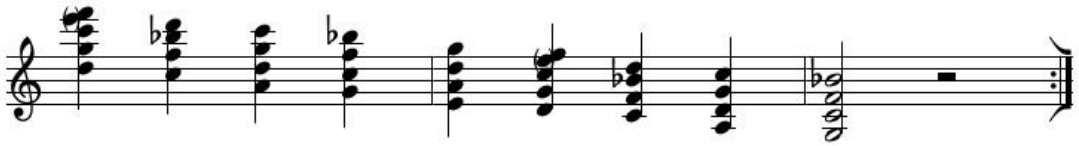
Exercise 26 (cont.)



Exercise 26 (cont.)



Exercise 26 (cont.)



CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have provided pedagogical material on chordal playing for jazz vibraphone. While some of the material covered aims at providing intermediate level knowledge on the subject of comping within a jazz group setting, advanced block chord techniques adapted from jazz piano playing are also covered in depth. Technical considerations that relate to four-mallet playing are also addressed. By offering both intermediate, as well as advanced material, this dissertation offers valuable information to jazz vibraphone students, whether they have prior experience on the instrument or not.

Chapter one addresses technical considerations when playing with a four-mallet approach. This includes a guide to using the Harris grip, a technique developed by vibraphonist Stefon Harris. His grip offers an alternative to the four-mallet grips primarily used by percussionists, and it has not been discussed in other pedagogical works. Other technical considerations are also discussed, including sound production on the bars, as well as sticking choices when playing in a four-mallet context.

Chapter two covers four-note chordal voicings that can be played on vibraphone, including closed position voicings, as well as drop 2 voicings. Playing ii-V-I progressions with these voicings is also addressed. Exercises covering these voicings, as well as their use in ii-V-I progressions are included in this chapter.

Chapter three includes advanced material, with analyses of "block chord" solos by notable jazz pianists. Pianists covered include Milt Buckner, George Shearing, Oscar Peterson, Red Garland, Phineas Newborn, and McCoy Tyner. Transcriptions of their solos are included, with discussions regarding the specific techniques that each pianist utilizes in their solo. How to adapt the block chord techniques used by these pianists to vibraphone is then covered. Vibraphone adaptations of each of the solos are also included.

Chapter four discusses the "block chord" techniques that were used in the solos discussed in

chapter three and focuses on how these specific techniques can be used in jazz vibraphone performance. The “locked hands” approach that Buckner, Shearing, Peterson, and Newborn all used is discussed. Red Garland’s approach to block chord playing, as well as McCoy Tyner’s quartal planing are also covered. Exercises that demonstrate how these techniques can be applied to the vibraphone are also included in this chapter.

While this dissertation offers insight into how pianistic chordal techniques can be applied to the vibraphone, the material discussed is just a small sample of the resources that are available. I encourage students that are interested in working on four-mallet vibraphone playing to seek out recordings that they like and to transcribe. Transcribing is one of the best ways to learn and internalize ideas and concepts in my opinion. I also encourage students to find other musicians to perform with as much as possible, as this is an integral part to the learning process.

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