MUSICAL NARRATIVES IN THE BEBOP VERNACULAR: THE MELODIC TRANSPLANT EXPERIMENT

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Abstract

Stories and/or narratives have been an integral part of jazz from its inception. The way in which these narratives appear within the bebop vernacular can be seen from a number of different vantage points. This paper considers why bebop has elements of story and/or narrative linking to various branches of linguistics; how the harmonic patterns being used for an improvisation may be a determining factor for these narratives; and how the melodic content that drives the narrative relies less on formulaic/thematic material and more on the harmonic patterns from where such material is derived. In order to explicate how this 'harmonic narrative' exists in a bebop improvisation I have developed a tool, that is both conceptual and technical in nature. This tool, the *harmonic narrative model,* was employed in the *melodic transplant* experiment to determine the impact of the harmonic patterns being used for improvisations in the bebop style and to what extent these patterns may contribute to the narrative. This is a study of the ephemerality of pitch specificity comprising a melodic idea within the bebop vernacular.

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Foreword

Thoughts from an English Born Jazz Musician in 2019

Within a literate and technologically based culture the traditional act of story-telling may be perceived as an antiquated or even archaic form of expression. Furthermore, it is conceivable that story-telling, in the traditional sense, is now seen as a childish pursuit: possibly lacking the 'sophistication' that many might feel our 'contemporary' culture exemplifies. The evidence that story-telling continues to proliferate is compelling; for example, the "Netflix series" phenomenon is indicative of this kind of proliferation. However, due to the omnipotent impact of technology many of the stories and the vernacular in which they are expressed are becoming singular: eliminating stylistic and conceptual diversity, and landing us in a place of 'cultural homogeneity'. The positive effects of such technological omnipotence could be seen as a means for musicians such as myself, to learn a vernacular style from another time and/or culture to express my own musical ideas.

As a jazz musician in 2019, my musical conception has been profoundly impacted by the far reaching effects of technology. My compositional and improvisatory style has been based on a musical genre that uses a vernacular that I would argue is, in large part, designed to tell stories. However, the cultural origin of these stories may reflect a universal human experience. History tells us that the narratives that exist within jazz stem from the complex expressions of an oppressed culture. The musical concepts and tenets that were born out of the bebop

generation (c. 1940 – 1950) have had the most profound effect on my musical identity. Therefore, one could argue that my musical concept or identity is indicative of a kind of cultural misappropriation. This is not an accusation that is frequently heard when looking at musicians within the jazz idiom but in my estimation the aforementioned factors could support such a claim.

Lawrence Gushee observes a dilemma similar to this when confronted with the dilemma of a musical experiment. He considers what the outcome might be if he were to alter the flow and order of choruses and/or phrases of Lester Young's 1936 solo on "Shoe Shine Boy." Gushee writes that he may not possess the 'cultural knowledge' or capacity to discern if such a reconstruction of Young's improvisation would alter the solo's intrinsic meaning. In order to pull the 'escape hatch' for this dilemma he declares that: "I can only offer myself as an immigrant."[1]

I argue that the adoption or acquisition of a vernacular style in jazz, through painstaking study and practise, is to a large extent earned (I cannot speak for Lawrence Gushee in this regard). Furthermore, the musical ideas and/or narratives that comprise the many jazz vernaculars were developed from a diaspora that forced many to modify their own cultural identities and values. Assimilating the aesthetic elements of an artistic style, whether from

[1] In Gushee's article "Shoe Shine Boy" he considers whether changing the order of the choruses of Lester Young's solo would significantly alter the meaning or the logic of the narrative.

one's own cultural background or from another, is markedly different from assuming a cultural identity or a misrepresentation of one's self.

The underlying discussion here alludes to what I would argue is the fundamentally altruistic purpose that is endemic to artistic expression. In my case, the expression of spontaneous musical narratives in the bebop vernacular is not a misrepresentation of my cultural identity but an expression of the human experience. Due to the many cultural influences that comprise jazz, one could say it is a form of expression that both embodies universality of human expression and is a flagship or an ambassador for cultural inclusivity. In this manner, the use of a specific means of artistic expression, whether native to one's own cultural identity or not, becomes simply a vehicle to convey one's own life experience not a misrepresentation of oneself.

My musical aspiration as a jazz musician is twofold: 1) draw from the jazz vernacular of the 1940s; 2) improvise and compose musical narratives using the core tenets of this style. These musical narratives are not intended to be imitative or derivative per se but merely reflective of my own life experience. The broader objective of my aspirations as a jazz musician is to forge my own style and approach within the bebop vernacular. I endeavour to remain connected to the conceptual tenets established by the creators of the bebop genre while striving not to become merely a banal and artistically derivative improviser.

Introduction

After more than thirty years of studying and listening to Charlie Parker's music (arguably the seminal bebop improviser) I have observed that despite the uniformity and repetitious nature of his melodic ideas there seems to be a fluidity or an interchangeability to them. I would argue that many of Parker's ideas were ephemeral despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary and that his musical ideas may have been chosen based primarily on their harmonic functionality. In other words, the melodic ideas developed by Parker may have been selected, not because of their melodic indelibility but the ease with which the (formulaic) ideas expeditiously illustrated the harmony. The Gestalt that is formed from the flow of these ideas appears in the form of what I am calling a harmonic narrative[2] which may be fundamental not only to Parker's improvisations but to those of many improvisers in the bebop genre.

The discussion within this paper is presented from five distinct vantage points:

1. **The Musicological**

Chapter I addresses the importance and/or role of formula, the possibility that a harmonic narrative exists within the bebop vernacular and, whether there is meaning found within such a narrative. Chapter II looks at the possible cultural and historical reasons why stories or narratives may be endemic to many jazz improvisations. Chapter III investigates how

[2] I am making a distinction between a musical narrative and a harmonic narrative due to the subject matter comprising this paper. The term harmonic narrative is more germane to the forthcoming discussion and therefore will be the more frequently used term.

the art of 'scat singing' may be indicative of the Africanisms that further contribute to these narratives.

2. The Paradigmatic

The conceptual tool that I have designed to explicate the narratives that I argue are endemic to the bebop style will be referred to as the *harmonic narrative model*.[3] This model is explained in detail in chapter IV and comprises four key tenets:

1. The context
2. The harmonic obligation
3. The subject
4. The means

Within a musical narrative in the bebop vernacular these four elements are coterminous and overlap in immeasurable ways. Throughout the discussion of this improvisatory model I will reveal how these four tenets are independent principles that function symbiotically.

3. The Experimental

In order to test the efficacy of the *harmonic narrative model* I conducted an experiment called, the *melodic transplant.* This is discussed and illustrated throughout chapter V. For this experiment the *harmonic narrative model* was used as a tool through which the existing pitches of a Charlie Parker solo could be replaced by new ones. The objective of transplanting the

[3] This model is a pedagogical tool I have designed to aid in musical analyses and musical creation.

melodic ideas and/ pitches whilst retaining the harmonic structure was twofold: 1) to observe if the perceived 'meaning' within Parker's melodic ideas was altered in any significant way; 2) to observe whether the flow of the narrative was altered in any way. The solo used for this experiment was Charlie Parker's 1946 recording of the George Gershwin classic "Oh, Lady be Good" (1926).

4. The Practical

Chapter V also includes the five re-compositions included with this thesis. Each of these re-compositions is a direct product of the *melodic transplant experiment* and is illustrated within the score. Part III of chapter V offers the conclusions I have drawn from this experiment and research.

5. The Pedagogical

Chapter VI discusses how the *harmonic narrative model* could be used as an educational tool; how the implementation of this tool could forge new *melodic transplant experiments*; and why this may be useful to both educators and students of jazz.

Chapter I: Formula, Narrative, and Meaning in the Bebop Vernacular

Formula and Thematic Motive

All improvising musicians have a series of melodic ideas they play, repeat and to some degree vary. These ideas are known as formulas. The variation of melodic ideas, whether formulaic (scripted) or improvised, is not necessarily indicative of thematic development and may occur inadvertently. I argue that the repetition or variation of a melodic idea within an improvisation in the bebop vernacular is most often intended to further illustrate the harmonic movement in a linear manner. If a melodic idea is chosen based on its propensity for revealing the underlying harmony, the role of formula becomes a highly effective tool. In this manner the role of melody becomes a means to further the harmonic narrative.

In *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, Barry Kernfeld cites Charlie Parker as the seminal "formulaic improviser." Kernfeld writes that formulaic improvisation is:

> …the principal manifestation of the fragmentary idea in jazz… a concept borrowed from epic poetry and western ecclesiastical chant…the formulas used do not call attention to themselves but are artfully hidden, through variation. The challenge presented with this kind of improvisation is to mold diverse fragments into a coherent whole.[4]

What Kernfeld meant when he writes that the diverse fragments are molded into "a coherent whole" is not entirely clear. However, as I just mentioned, if formula "one of the most

[4] Kernfeld, Barry. "Improvisation" from *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* (2nd edition). Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 313-323.

ambiguous terms in jazz analysis,"[5] is viewed as necessary for the flow of an improvised harmonic narrative then the cliché that jazz improvisations 'tell a story' has some further basis. It may well be that the harmonic narratives that stem from Parker's implementation of formulaic material are in part, the sum of his remark: "there's stories and stories and stories that can be told in the musical idiom, you know."[6]

One of the key contributors to the body of research that helped to establish the consensus that Parker was a formulaic improviser was Thomas Owens. His work on Parker in the early 1970s was unprecedented. No one before had delved so deeply and so thoroughly into a formal study of Parker's melodic language. His dissertation *Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation* still stands as one of the most exhaustive studies into the formulaic tools used by Charlie Parker. Owens' study is a statistical feat: he not only catalogues one hundred formulaic fragments but he accounts for the number of times each fragment is played by Parker.

Henry Martin has followed in the footsteps of Owens' but has taken the study of Parker a step further. Martin's book *Charlie Parker and Thematic Improvisation* in some respects takes Owens' lead but moves the analyses of Parker in another direction. Martin suggests that there is evidence of thematic development within a select group of Parker's solos and that the material for this development is derived from the melody itself. This observation is consistent

[5] Brownell, John. "Analytical Models of Jazz Improvisation." 1994, pp. 9-29.
[6] From an interview with Paul Desmond and John Flitch WHDH, Boston Massachusetts circa January 1954.

with the classical European model of 'theme and variation'. He offers examples of Parker's thematic approach as it appears on the 1946 recording of Dizzy Gillespie's "Shaw-Nuff'" (1945), Parker's own blues "Perhaps" (written and recorded for Savoy records, 1948) and the Tiny Grimes tune "Red Cross" (1947) among others.

Both Martin and Owens use European musical principles and values for their chosen techniques and methods of observation. For example, Owens catalogues Parker's formulae a-rhythmically (consistent with species counter-point) or without the use of bar lines to indicate the phrasing. This approach disregards the possibility that a change in the phrasing could alter the meaning or 'feel' of the formulaic material. Henry Martin's work on Parker uses the analytical method devised by Heinrich Schenker to reveal the foreground and "background layers" [7] revealed by the melodic information. A superficial application of the Schenkerian method of analyses will always have relevance to Parker's music. This is due to Parker's alacritous melodic illustration of the harmony (I will discuss this further throughout this paper).

Albert Lord and Milman Parry's studies of epic poetry and Western ecclesiastical are also relevant to the use of formula in jazz improvisations. Their observation that formula is "a group of words regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea"[8] is consistent to some degree with how melodic ideas often appear in a jazz

[7] The background layer in the Schenkerian method reveals the simplest of harmonic functions such as the triadic structures and the simplest levels of voice-leading.
[8] Milman Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I: Homer and Homeric Style," *HSCP*, 41:80 (1930).

improvisation. Such predetermined material is also further indication that efficiency of content within the idea being conveyed is crucial when constructing an improvisation. A series of errors or musical blunders can be avoided simply through the use of expeditious formulaic material. I argue that within the bebop vernacular it is not the melodic idea that is of intrinsic value but the harmonic implication and functionality of said idea.

Gunther Schuller's seminal article regarding Sonny Rollins' motivic improvisational style was also one of a European analytical design. The use of European analytical models to analyse the music of Parker and the bebop generation may be demonstrative of a desire to validate their musical concepts and artistic contributions. When responding to the implication that the European musical tradition had influenced bebop, Parker states emphatically:

> …the thing that's going- happening now known as "progressive music" or by the trade name "bebop," not a bit of it was inspired or adapted by our predecessors: Bach, Brahms, Beethoven, Chopin, Ravel, Debussy, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, et cetera.[9]

Analytical models that explicate the attributes of European based musical principles may be limited in addressing the bebop musical genre. If we are to uncover the attributes that comprise the musical concepts of musicians such as Parker we may need to refer to and/or use different models for analysis: a new set of tools may be required.

[9] From an interview with John McClellan for WHDH radio in Boston c. June 1953.

Narrative and Meaning

The statement that jazz improvisations "tell a story"[10] is a ubiquitous cliché, but quantifying how and where this occurs is exceedingly difficult. The crux of the problem lies in the subjectivity of the theoretical criteria that is required to establish what may or may not constitute a musical story. From an analytical and pedagogical standpoint this presents enormous obstacles, making it difficult to ascertain if there is a logic that belies this kind of subjectivity.

The proposition that a narrative is endemic to the bebop style inadvertently wrangles together some of the accompanying models of linguistics (in order to round out the analogy). John Brownell observes that the genre that has attracted a lot of attention in this regard is "improvised music, where the parallels with language are even more alluring. Both, after all are spontaneous utterances. Both clearly have structure and syntactic content."[11] Most analyses does not investigate the possible connections or links found within the music of Charlie Parker but an exception is the online article authored by Steve Coleman entitled *The Dozens,* where Coleman observes that:

> …there are also the linguistic aspects of Parker's music…there is definitely a conscious attempt to express the music using a conversational logic. So what I am saying is that while syntax is important, semantics is primary. Too often what the music refers to, or may refer to is ignored.[12]

[10] This is most relevant and/or applicable to jazz pre c. 1960.
[11] Brownell, John. *Analytical Models of Jazz Improvisation. 1994,* pp. 9-29.
[12] Coleman, Steve. *The Dozens: Steve Coleman on Charlie Parker,* edited by Ted Panken and Steve Coleman, 04/02/2019.

As I mentioned in the opening paragraph of this section the extent to which linguistics and music do affect one another is exceedingly difficult to quantify making it an area of study that is fraught with subjectivity. That Coleman or I perceive there to be some form of story in one of Charlie Parker's improvisations indicatives such a subjective perception. Establishing the criteria to quantifiably explicate the link between linguistics and music is merely the start of the problem, opening a 'Pandora's box'.

The underlying subject within this 'Pandora's box' is what Leonard Meyer refers to as "embodied meaning."[13] In his book *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* Raymond Monelle[14] addresses the subjectivity of meaning as it is found in a musical context or idea. Paraphrasing the writings of Peter Kivy and John Neubauer, Monelle tells us that "music is 'expressive of sadness' rather than that it merely 'expresses' sadness (Kivy 1980, p. 23). 'In other words, the affect of sadness is not a result of music but a quality we ascribe to it' (Neubauer 1986, p. 15)."

Due to the limited use of musical dynamics (extreme louds, softs etc.) by Charlie Parker and much of the bebop generation, the meaning or satisfying element may, in part, be found within the flow of the harmonic narrative. The fact that "no 'literal' meaning can be ascribed to musical terms"[15] or in this case to a musical narrative further indicates that the perceived

[13] Meyer, Leonard B. *Emotion and Meaning in Music,* The University of Chicago Press, 1956 p. 39.
[14] Monelle, Raymond. *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music,* Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992.
[15] Monelle, Raymond. *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music.* 1992, p. 15.

meaning in the bebop vernacular may exist within the flow of ideas and not the content or dynamics. One would be hard-pressed to isolate a singular emotion that is applicable to an improvisation by Parker. In fact, many of his improvisation encompass an exceedingly broad emotional spectrum. Therefore, what is heard and felt is not happy or sad, to oversimplify, but an experience revealed by the flow of a spontaneous collection of serialized harmonic ideas.

If it is the flow of the harmonic narrative that is being experienced, then it is possible that the meaning or the intention of the narrative is understood despite the lack of literal meaning or recognizable emotional content. This further eliminates the need for the listener to actually 'understand' the musical ideas. In a similar way one could suggest that despite not recognizing a Greek mythological reference within a Shakespearian Sonnet, one can still glean meaning and/or satisfaction from the experience. In jazz, it is conceivable that this satisfaction is found in what Kernfeld calls a "coherent whole" or in what I am calling the harmonic narrative. In his book *Talk's Body* (1979) David Sudnow writes:

> Think about the way a new jazz fan hears a Charlie Parker solo. The listener does not grasp the rapid course of notes taken one by one. He is not precisely tuned into that sort of detail. But this only means he does not know the language that way. He still taps his foot, nods with the phrases, attends the ups and downs perhaps the movement of harmonies. Is his knowledge incomplete? No.[16]

Conversely, the enjoyment of an improvisation by Parker or a Sonnet by Shakespeare would be greater if the fragments of information that comprise the whole are comprehended

[16] Sudnow, David. *Talk's Body: A Meditation between Two Keyboards.* Knopf; 1st edition (1979).

or understood; if the listener understands the point of reference being cited by the author (improviser) the intended meaning becomes clearer and the experience is enriched. John Brownell[17] cites an article called *Miles Davis Meets Noam Chomsky* (1981) by Alan Perlman and Daniel Greenblatt where they distinguish between those who are "inside" and those who are "outside" the jazz culture. In other words, those who were 'hip' and those who were 'square'.

> …the outside audience really do not hear or understand improvised solos. For the outside audience, jazz improvisation does not have a structural or historical meaning…they have no sense at all of what to expect from a solo…[18]

Such elitism has a justifiable foundation but I would argue that due to the "vernacular of the streets"[19] that was used by the bebop generation there was a high degree of melodic inclusivity within the bebop style: listeners simply needed to educate themselves (a little). The melodic language, in and of itself, was often not particularly lofty and therefore could be understood with a fairly rudimentary musical education. It is the flow of the harmony (the harmonic narrative) as illustrated by this melodic language that is one of the most compelling features of the bebop vernacular.

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[17] Brownell, John. "Analytical Models of Jazz Improvisation." 1995, pp. 9-29.
[18] Perlman, Alan M. and Danial Greenblat. "Miles Davis meets Noam Chomsky: Some Observations on Language and Structure." *The Sign in Music and Literature.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
[19] Interview with Paul Desmond and John Flitch WHDH, Boston Massachusetts circa January 1954.

Chapter II: Stories within Jazz and the Bebop Vernacular

"He [Dizzy} was playing a, oh, what you might call in the vernacular of the streets…"[20]

Charlie Parker

Steve Larson describes Charlie Parker's 1946 solo on George Gershwin's "Oh, Lady Be Good" (1926) in the following way: "it is as if it were a stirring speech, compelling argument, rousing sermon, or engaging story."[21] Lawrence Gushee refers to narratives in jazz as being "semiotic: this story transcends the repetitive, hierarchical structure of the tune and its harmonization, and depends on the use of typologically different material." [22]

In his book *Blues People,* Amiri Baraka observes that the lineage of African-American culture can be seen as a social narrative that is told through the evolving musical styles beginning with the blues. Baraka writes that:

> …songs extolling the merits of heroes and heroic archetypes… and as blues began to expand its references it still remained a kind of singing that told about the exploits of the singer. The whole concept of the *solo*, of a man singing or playing by himself, was relatively unknown in West African Music.[23]

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[20] Interview with Paul Desmond and John Flitch WHDH, Boston Massachusetts circa January 1954.

[21] Larson, Steve. "The Art of Charlie Parker's Rhetoric" from *Annual Review of Jazz Studies 8:* 1996

[22] Gushee, Lawrence. "Lester Young's Shoe Shine Boy" from *A Lester Young Reader.* Lewis Porter, ed. (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

[23] Baraka, Amiri. *Blues People.* Harper Collins, New York, 1963, pp. 65-66.

The role of the soloist singing or playing their "own exploits" is a defining model within the jazz and blues idioms. This *modus operandi,* could also be seen as being endemic to the bebop generation and to Charlie Parker. These "exploits," of course, were not offered in the same literal manner but the complexities of the racially charged political environment within the United States in the 1940's surely contributed to the musical identity of the bebop generation. Within this generation of musicians, the small group format of a quartet or a quintet became the cornerstone. These small configurations allowed the soloist to have many 'cracks at the whip' in order to execute their individual harmonic narratives, the success rate of which would vary considerably. These harmonic narratives possessed much juxtaposition: they were both steeped in the conservative Tin Pan Alley (popular song) harmonic patterns (discussed further shortly) and the iconoclasm of a generation of musicians that played primarily for their own edification.

Through the course of my research on this subject I was surprised to learn that the aspiration to 'tell a story' was also a part of John Coltrane's approach during the recording session of *Giant Steps* (Atlantic, 1960). The music for this date was highly technical and far more harmonically complex than the Tin Pan Alley chord progressions typically used by the bebop generation. At the end of an aborted third take of "Giant Steps" Coltrane laments in a defeated tone: "How am I going to do that? How am I going to do that? Cause' the story's never told…" It is significant and revealing that storytelling was still imperative for John Coltrane at a time when his musical ambitions were moving towards far more abstract concepts.

I speculate that the "conversational logic," that Steve Coleman[24] observes about Parker's music is what Coltrane may have been striving for during his "Giant Steps" recording. A logic that seems to be apparent in what appears to be a simple or even offhand series of musical gestures. I can attest that while improvising on such a complex harmonic pattern as "Giant Steps" this kind of 'nonchalance' is exceedingly difficult to maintain. This may be further evidence of why Parker played the same simple harmonic patterns repeatedly. It is possible that Parker was not using 'rhythm changes' to gain harmonic mastery over the progression but as a means to invent a coherent harmonic narrative. The simplicity of the harmonic pattern was chosen on the basis of its functionality: something he could manipulate with alacrity.

The African Link and Cultural Implications

It is well known that music in Africa is often used for functional purpose and furthermore as a means of communication. The drums that are used in some African music are able to communicate messages that *have* a literal meaning. This is established in part by the rhythm but predominantly by the pitch. These codified messages can be seen/heard within the role of the talking drum in African culture. This drum that was further used in early African-American culture in the United States. By playing specific pitches and rhythms, the talking drum

[24] Coleman, Steve. *The Dozens: Steve Coleman on Charlie Parker.* Edited by Ted Panken and Steve Coleman, 04/02/ 2019.

became an effective means for African-Americans to communicate messages, sometimes at great distances. The potential threat of this was soon realized by the white slave owners and the talking drum and other drums were swiftly abolished.[25]

The eradication of the drum was an important difference between the experience of the Africans that were sent to the United States and those who were sent to other parts of the 'Americas'. The Africans that were dispersed throughout South America and the Caribbean islands were permitted, to varying degrees, to continue using many of the drums: keeping them as one of their primary means of musical expression. Without the drum as a part of their day-to-day lives, the African-American culture in the United States had to find other means by which to musically express themselves. The specific dates of these historical events are unknown, but would have most certainly preceded the first musical notes played in the jazz vernacular. Was jazz, in part, born out of a random set of circumstances such as this?

Another outcome from the eradication of the drum could have been that the role of orators, storytellers within the African slave communities became even more essential. The drum is the centrifugal element in virtually all African culture: its absence would have been an immeasurable loss resulting in a huge cultural deficit. Was this deficit was made up for by the storytellers within the communities? In West Africa the individuals with the responsibility for

[25] The use of the drums in Congo Square (New Orleans) is a notable exception.

storytelling in the community are far more than just storytellers: they are musicians, spiritual guides, and healers, and are still known, to this day, as Griots.

In European culture a similar figure existed: the minstrel. However, by the early twentieth century, minstrels were all but disappearing. Was this disappearance in part, as a result of the rise in literacy rates throughout Europe and the Western world? This change, both culturally and technologically began with the advent of the printing press in c.1440 leading to a rise in the rate of literacy. This was initially most prevalent within the more affluent communities but by the end of the 19th century became quite commonplace. One could argue that such events significantly lessened the need for an oral tradition. Furthermore, the composers and musical creators from the European tradition were nearly all from affluent backgrounds. Is this why there is less of a "conversational logic" or musical vernacular within much of the classical European musical styles (with the exception of some of the music written in a dance form such as the gigue or the waltz)? and why the composition became paramount and improvisations became merely a useful tool but not an end within themselves?

I would argue that the importance of and need for stories, oral tradition and improvisation in cultures where the rates of illiteracy are very high is immeasurable. Until circa 1930 the reliance on oral traditions and/or stories was a defining element within African-American culture. This would have manifested itself not only in stories but in the teachings of music, values, beliefs, history etc. To clarify: I am not stating that all African-Americans pre c. 1930 were uneducated or for that matter illiterate. However, the fact remains that many

African-Americans were denied the right to an education up until the turn of the 19th century and even through much of the twentieth-century. In his book *The Birth of Bebop* Scott Deveaux tells of Dizzy Gillespie's experience growing up in South Carolina in the 1930s. Deveaux writes that "after graduating from the ninth grade, Gillespie spent part of the summer of 1933 on a WPA (Works, Progress and Administration) road gang alongside grown men who couldn't write their own names."[26]

Conversely, the proliferation of oral traditions within environments that have high rates of illiteracy may, in some cases, actually have a positive cultural influence. Oral traditions have had a profound effect on the jazz idiom, not just through the tried and tested tradition of learning things by ear[27] but from a paradigmatic perspective, providing a paradigm of musical expression that hails the import of the improvised narrative or story.

These oral traditions may also have resulted in the development of unique musical vernaculars which were passed on from generation to generation. It is these vernaculars that may be endemic to the narratives Baraka writes of in his book *Blues People* when he observes how the African-American cultural and social lineage can be seen through the evolution of their

[26] Deveaux, Scott, *The Birth of Bebop, a social and Musical History.* University of California Press, 1997, p. 176.

[27] Playing by ear is an essential skill for any improvising musician. Such a skill enables one to play without sheet music, particularly if one is unfamiliar with the material at hand. Furthermore, when Coltrane left the Mile Davis group to play with Thelonious Monk he would go to Monk's house every day to learn Monk's tunes. Monk taught Coltrane his music by playing the compositions over and over until Coltrane learned them.

musical tradition and style. The importance of style is a defining element of a vernacular and of cultural expression. The fact that the influence of the African American cultural style actually goes far beyond music is observed by Amiri Baraka:

> …[bebop] came to denote some kind of social nonconformity attributable to the *general* American scene, and not merely to the Negro. Bebopper jokes were as popular during the forties as the recent beatnik jokes…The bebop "costume" which became the rage for the "hip" or "hep" (then) young America, was merely an adaptation of the dress Dizzy Gillespie, one of the pioneers of bebop, wore.[28]

African-American traditions and cultural expression were and remain to this day, an ubiquitous influence on style. The outward expression of an individual's identity whether in the form of clothing, language or music has been influenced by the African-American. This cultural influence can be seen today not only in North American culture but in cultures throughout the world. The singular prevailing musical force of this influence can be seen today in the rhythmic/rhyming narratives of hip hop.

The narratives found within the music of the bebop idiom are in many ways similar to those in hip hop. In both mediums of musical expression the seed of an idea is sown and its germination is realized through a series of highly digressive improvised narratives that are often filled with loose but provocative associations.[29] I argue that neither musical style is particularly concerned with melody: hip hop comprises rhyme and rhythm and bebop comprises harmony

[28] Baraka, Amiri. *Blues People.* Harper Collins, New York, 1963, p. 190.
[29] There were also literary figures and comedians that followed in the footsteps of the bebop pioneers. Namely, Lenny Bruce, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, etc.

and rhythm. In other words, hip hop primarily reveals a rhythmic narrative whereas bebop expresses more of a harmonic narrative.

The expressive styles of these two distinctive yet similar genres of music reveal that they are in many ways 'two sides of the same coin': the introverted expression of the beboppers versus the extroverted expression of hip hop artists. Endemic to both are the brazen and irreverent attitudes that challenge the status quo in a manner saturated with swagger and iconoclasm, affecting not only musical style but the manner in which people walk, talk, dress etc. The African-American sensibility continues to proliferate and influence the direction of improvised music on a global scale.

Chapter III: Scat, Rhyme, and Nonsense Syllables

"The rhythm of the melody is derived partly from the rhythm of the words as they would normally be spoken, and partly from the rhythm naturally produced by imitative sequences and, as in the West, by the whole building of the tune."[30]

Arthur Morris Jones

This chapter investigates three main points of interest:

1) the importance of how music is played versus what is played

2) the possible origins of scat singing and nonsense rhymes in African American music

3) how scat singing may have influenced the bebop vernacular and the narratives that lie within it

In the year 1939 Jimmy Lunceford informed us that "T'aint What You Do (It's the Way That You Do It)," and "that's what gets results."[31] The manner in which an individual expresses a narrative using any given vernacular, whether in speech or music, is no exception. The manner or style in which a language is spoken, written or played profoundly affects the perceived meaning of the content and/or the subject matter. The way in which Charlie Parker

[30] Jones, Arthur Morris. *Studies in African Music. 1978,* p. 21.
[31] Composed by Trummy Young and Sy Oliver 1939.

transforms a simple melody from the Tin Pan Alley repertoire using his unique vernacular exemplifies this. In Parker's music, the tune often undergoes a virtual transformation: in essence becoming a new musical thought or idea. Scott Deveaux points to the import of an individual's vernacular style of expression when discussing one of Louis Armstrong's trumpet solos. Deveaux writes that:

> like a master elocutionist, Armstrong builds intensity through an accumulation of well-timed and expertly shaped phrases. His eloquence, as with the black preacher in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* consists more in the manner of saying than what is being said.[32]

In a musical context this "manner of saying" may be most obvious and apparent within the unique tradition of scat singing. The art of scat singing comprises a series of nonsense sounds and syllables that are expressed in such a way to imply that there may be a kind of meaning to the sounds although they have no literal meaning whatsoever. When scat singing is performed by musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Eddie Jefferson or George Benson the musical sentences and narratives that are formed from these nonsense sounds or invented words appear to create a logical pattern.[33]

[32] Deveaux, Scott, *The Birth of Bebop, a social and Musical History,* University of California Press, 1997, p. 82.

[33] This logic stems from not only the inflection within what is being said but more importantly from the harmonic context (discussed in further detail in part I of the *harmonic narrative model*).

Another distinct advantage to making up the sounds, that essentially form the spontaneous lyric, is that the improviser is never without a necessary rhyme. When words rhyme they seem to offer another layer of logical nuance that suggests there is meaning, often when there may be none to speak of. In this manner there is a clear beginning and predictable (satisfying) end to the musical phrase. This kind of perceived meaning can further aid in creating a sense of form or structure to a scat solo.

The nonsense words that are invented by the aforementioned scat singers cohere to some degree with what John Brownell refers to in linguistics as "allowable utterances."[34] In his article *Analytical Models of Jazz Improvisation* Brownell discusses the importance of these types of language fragments. He states that the rule of "well formedness" does not necessarily beget meaning and vice versa. Brownell writes:

> There are rules which determine whether a particular set of phonemes constitutes an allowable utterance. A well-formed word need not be meaningful. For example, the construction "dorg" is well-formed; it follows the rules for word construction in English, it simply has no referent, while another combination of the same letters "rgdo", is neither well-formed nor meaningful.

The sounds used for scat singing do possess "well formedness" but are without literal meaning. From a musical perspective this 'meaning' could be seen as being defined by the rhythm and the melodic pitches that are assigned to and revealed by these nonsense sounds. I would argue that the meaning may actually be found within the rhyme, the perceived

[34] Brownell, John. "Analytical Models of Jazz Improvisation," 1994 pp. 9-29.

coherence and flow, and the resultant musical narrative. One can see the importance of the flow and rhyming elements in the title of Big Joe Turner hit "Flip, Flop and Fly, I Don't Care if I Die."[35] In this example the words are both "well formed" and meaningful although the lyric only makes sense because of the phrasing and the rhyme. In literal terms this phrase is rendered meaningless however, from a musical perspective it is quite provocative and satisfying.

Due to the highly inclusive nature of the bebop vernacular there is actually very little criteria for what does and does not constitute a "well-formed" idea. If the improviser creates ideas that clearly spell out the harmonic pattern (the context) and/or the voice-leading then "well-formedness" is, to some degree, achieved. This is a distinct feature of the bebop vernacular, making the melodic material highly malleable and inclusive in nature while allowing for melodic ideas to be altered capriciously, with or without intention, at any given time. As the *melodic transplant experiment* illustrates, (chapter V) the perceived meaning or 'feel' of the music may remain if the harmonic structure, rhythm and phrase are upheld despite the alteration of the pitches.

The Origins of Scat Singing

The origins of scat singing and the use of nonsense sounds in jazz and in the bebop vernacular, are largely unknown. However, in North America there is some documentation to suggest that the beginnings of scat singing may precede the Louis Armstrong scat solo on the

[35] Composed by Charles E. Calhoun and Lou Willie Turner, 1955.

1926 recording[36] of "Heebie Jeebies."[37] According to Jelly Roll Morton, this is not the origin of scat singing. In a recorded series of conversations from 1938 with the musicologist Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe (Jelly Roll Morton)[38] recalls that scat singing goes back to the turn of the twentieth century.

> …I'll sing you some scat songs. That was way before Louis Armstrong's time. By the way, scat is something that a lot of people don't understand, and they begin to believe that the first scat numbers was ever done, was done by one of my hometown boys, Louie Armstrong. But I must take the credit away, since I know better. The first man that ever did a scat number in history of this country was a man from Vicksburg, Mississippi, by the name of Joe Sims, an old comedian. And from that, Tony Jackson and myself, and several more grabbed it in New Orleans. And found it was pretty good for an introduction of a song.

Scat singing was clearly something that was happening within the burgeoning African-American culture at the turn of the century. As a form of musical expression it was presumably occurring in many other places other than those cited by Morton. It is widely known that Jelly Roll Morton's recounting of jazz folklore was to some degree discredited by his declaration that he was the "inventor of jazz."[39] Morton was a great musician but at times perhaps more of a florid raconteur than anything else. That notwithstanding, Jelly Roll's recollection of scat singing reveals that this form of musical expression was a part of the cultural *modus operandi* at the turn of the last century and possibly even earlier.

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[36] Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five, 1926 OKeh records.
[37] Composed by Boyd Atkins, 1926
[38] Jelly Roll Morton's name is also based in a colloquial vernacular: "Jelly Roll" was a term of sexual metaphor.
[39] Unknown source.

The prevalence of nonsense syllables for the expression of musical ideas is also a typical feature of some African music. Due to the sparsely documented nature of African musical history, it is quite probable that scat singing may have dated back to centuries before to Morton's first encounter with it. In his book *Studies in African Music Volume I and Volume II,* the Reverend Arthur Morris Jones offers us further insight into the possibility that scat singing finds its origins in African music. Throughout the book Jones relies heavily on the musical guidance of a musician named Mr. Tay.

Jones offers us a plausible explanation for what may reflect some of the cultural origins of scat singing in jazz. This comes to light when Jones recollects a recording session that he had organized for Mr. Tay. This recording was intended to have Mr. Tay document and help to further illustrate some of the musical concepts that Jones was researching. Jones writes that on the day of the recording "Mr. Tay came with a paper containing the nonsense syllables he intended to play." Mr. Tay then informs Jones that "the difficulty about variations is that they come into your head in the moment of playing and then are forgotten."[40] The ephemeral and transient documentation of historical events and music has been an intrinsic part of jazz from the very beginning. Below is a brief excerpt from the nonsense syllables that were written down by Mr. Tay to use as his compositional/performance aid:

azegi gazegleegi
azeglezegi, gitegi tegite
tegi, tegi, tegi, tegi

[40] Jones, Arthur Morris. *Studies in African Music Volume I.* Oxford University Press, *1978,* p. 181.

tegi tegi tegi
ga ga te te te te te te
gaga te te, gitegi gaga gi[41]

Arthur Morris Jones explores further the links between Mr. Tay's musical concept and the nonsense musical language. Jones writes that "we next look at the content of the verses and find that this also is in poetic form, consisting mostly of couplets and triplets." The similarities of this nonsense verse and poetic form with the bebop vernacular is significant. When speaking about Charlie Parker, bassist Tommy Potter remembers that:

> On record dates he could compose right on the spot. The A. & R. man would be griping, wanting us to begin. Charlie would say, "It'll just take a minute," and he'd write out eight bars, usually just for the trumpet. He could transpose it for his alto without a score. The channel [bridge] of the tune could be ad libbed. The rhythm section was familiar with all the progressions of the tunes which were usually the basis of originals.[42]

These historical events, as they are recounted by Potter, reflect a similar African musical sensibility: many of the ideas are fleeting and of the moment.

Bebop Nonsense

The African's use of nonsense language for musical purpose may be, indirectly, responsible for the trade name or moniker, bebop. The term bebop, is actually a nonsense

[41] Jones, Arthur Morris. *Studies in African Music Volume I.* Oxford University Press, *1978* p. 184
[42] Reisner, Robert. *Bird the Legend of Charlie Parker.* Quartet books, *1974,* p. 183.

word that is in itself, onomatopoeic. The sound of the syllables that comprise the term bebop are musically illustrated within many of the bebop anthems. Two well know examples of this are "Thelonious Monk's "52nd St. Theme" (1946) and Dizzy Gillespie's composition "Groovin' High"[43] (1945).

Invented/nonsense words form many of the song titles from the bebop epoch. An example of this is found in Dizzy Gillespie's 1946 tune dedicated to Kenny Clarke (whose nickname was "Klook, Mop"[44]) called, "Oop Bop Sh'Bam (a Klook a Mop)." The Origin of Clarke's onomatopoeic nickname came from the vernacular sound of his drum figures. Gillespie and Clarke composed another tune in 1945 also based on a typical bebop drum figure, to which they added the lyric "Salt Peanuts,"[45] a lyric which is utterly meaningless and but sounds strikingly similar to the phrase 'bop bebop'.

Other titles from the bebop epoch that share the features of nonsense words or syllables are Thelonious Monk's "Rhythm-a-ning" (1958), "Trinkle, Tinkle" (1952), and "Jackie-ing" (1957), Sonny Rollins' "Airegin"[46] (1954), and Tadd Dameron's "Gnid"[47] (1957). From the

[43] As it was the case with so many tunes from this era, both of these compositions are contrafacts. In this case Thelonious Monk's "52nd St' Theme" (c. 1945) is based on the harmonic pattern from Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm" (1930) for the A sections and the B section is based on Fats Waller's bridge from "Honeysuckle Rose" (1929). Dizzy's tune "Groovin' High" is based on John Schonberger's hit from 1920, "Whispering."
[44] Kernfeld, Barry. "Clarke, Kenny". *American National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
[45] Gillespie, Dizzy and Kenny Clarke, 1945.
[46] Airegin is Nigeria spelt backwards.
[47] Gnid is ding spelt backwards.

world of rhythm and blues the famous introduction to Little Richard's 1965 hit "Tutti Frutti" is also comprised of a string of nonsense sounds. However, when Little Richard sings the phrase they seem to make perfect logical sense.

Charlie Parker also embraced this tradition of forming nonsense words and sounds for the titles of his compositions, as in "Ah-Leu Cha" (1948), "Klactoveedsedstene" (1947), and "Au Privave" (1951). All these constitute made up sounds or invented words. It is quite possible that Parker intended these titles to sound like words in a variety of languages- Spanish, Swedish and French respectively- but this can only be conjecture. Ross Russell (owner of Dial records) remembers that:

> There are two takes of "Klactoveedsedstene," which is the title that Charlie Parker gave me. He wrote it out on a piece of paper and gave it to me and said, "That's it man." I remember I asked a psychiatrist if he could read anything into it; he couldn't. I found a man with a background in philology. I thought maybe he could come up with something; and he couldn't. Then, I finally got around to asking some of the cats, and they said, "Why it's just a sound man." And that's what it is.[48]

That there is a link between linguistics and jazz is quite clear. In the next chapter I will address how the harmonic structures endemic to bebop improvisations are essential to the formation of this link: it is the harmony that determines the available melodic material. As I have previously mentioned I have intentionally omitted a discussion pertaining to the rhythm and phrase elements from this paper due to the vastness of such an endeavour. Furthermore,

[48] Reisner, Robert. *Bird, The Legend of Charlie Parker.* Quartet books, 1974 p. 202.

the *melodic transplant experiment* was conducted to explicate the attributes and features of the harmonic narrative, not the rhythm and the phrasing, within the bebop vernacular.

Chapter IV: The Harmonic Narrative Model

Introduction

The *harmonic narrative model* is a tool that was designed to illustrate how the chord progression or the context used for an improvisation in the bebop vernacular determines some of the available melodic possibilities for the harmonic narrative. This tool is both technical and conceptual in nature and accounts for not only for an improviser's harmonic choices but to some degree their musical actions and behavior. In order to use this tool effectively however, one must have a thorough grasp of the technical aspects of harmony coupled with an understanding of the musical vernacular to which it is being applied.

To briefly recap; the four tenets comprising the *harmonic narrative model* are as follows:

1. The context
2. The harmonic obligation
3. The subject
4. The means

The equation or linear process by which these four tenets cohere can be further illustrated thusly: the context informs the harmonic obligation; the harmonic obligation determines a potential subject; this subject requires a means; the means is informed by all the

preceding tenets. The fundamental goal or aim of this equation is to establish the available/necessary pitches to be used as melodic devices in order to construct a harmonic narrative.

From the analogous perspective of a game of hockey (discussed further in part II of this chapter) there are some distinct similarities/equivalents with this model. The context is the enclosure (ice rink) where the game is played; the obligation is the player's adherence to the rules; the subject is akin to the goals that must be scored; the means is the strategy that is used to navigate and/or play the game. The culminating element, one hopes, is that the game is won, or in the case of an improvisation in the bebop vernacular, that the harmonic narrative is successful.

The following discussion of the *harmonic narrative model* is divided into four parts. Each section further illustrates, in detail, the role, purpose and implication of each tenet and how they affect one another.

IV: I The Context

The context within the *harmonic narrative model* is defined by the harmonic attributes of the chord pattern and the durational values that accompany this pattern. In the bebop idiom the combination of these two predetermined elements forms the underlying structure or basis for an improvisation. The repetition of this form accounts for much of the 'background layer' that is imperative for the flow of the harmonic narrative. The present discussion is centred

around how this form or context relates to the harmonic narratives within the bebop vernacular. I will be leaving the durational values that accompany these patterns for a latter discussion.

Tin Pan Alley

Within the bebop generation of the 1940s the harmonic context used for an improvisation was typically derivative or often a carbon copy of the chord progressions developed by the Tin Pan Alley songsmiths and composers (c. 1900-1940). Some of the most notable contributors (albeit unintentional) from the Tin Pan Alley conglomerate of songsmiths to the harmonic contexts exploited by the bebop generation were George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin et al.

Charlie Parker, one of the archetypical figures of the bebop idiom, employed the Tin Pan Alley harmonic contexts for virtually all his improvisations and compositions. Furthermore, Parker's contribution to the existing catalogue of harmonic contexts was sparse and insubstantial.[49] The evidence reveals that there is a shortfall when looking at the contributions from the bebop generation to harmonic contexts used for composing and improvising (albeit with a few notable exceptions).[50]

[49] "Confirmation" (c. 1945) may be Parker's greatest compositional contribution to the catalogue of harmonic contexts.

[50] The majority of Charlie Parker's output comes directly from the Tin Pan Alley chordal patterns. However, there are examples from Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Tadd Dameron

Many of the musicians from this generation were more interested in exploiting the musical potential found within the already well-established harmonic contexts from Tin Pan Alley. The attraction to these chord progressions from the fin de siecle popular song repertoire was due to their inherent usefulness. By improvising on the chord progressions of the immensely fertile and logical Tin Pan Alley progressions, musicians such as Charlie Parker could more effectively spin their own harmonic narratives (discussed further throughout this chapter).

Another harmonic context that was frequently used by the bebop musicians for their improvisatory and compositional outings was the twelve bar blues. The origins of the traditional harmonic sequence endemic to the twelve bar blues is unknown.[51] Furthermore, Jelly Roll Morton observed that he did not hear what we recognize as the blues until the turn of the twentieth-century. Be that as it may, the chordal pattern that formed the blues chord progression that was used by the bebop generation actually possesses similar harmonic attributes to the Tin Pan Alley chordal patterns. It is quite possible that the ubiquitous influence of the aforementioned Tin Pan Alley composers appears in the blues chord progression as used by the bebop generation. The harmonic context of the blues that was derived from the Tin Pan Alley chordal sequences is still considered to be the 'standard' in jazz, even to this day.

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among others who did, in fact, contribute significantly to the harmonic contexts used for bebop improvisations.

[51] There is documentation to suggest W. C. Handy was responsible for the traditional twelve bar blues however, the evidence to support this is somewhat anecdotal.

This type of alteration of the traditional blues harmony is a further indication of the beboppers' reliance on the harmonic concepts that were developed by the Tin Pan Alley composers. These contexts aided musicians such as Charlie Parker to create what appear to be highly structured and provocative harmonic narratives. [52] The blues was altered to cohere with the musical purpose of the bebop generation: essentially becoming merely another useful chord progression that, in this case, was twelve bars long.[53]

The Tin Pan Alley chord progressions form the basis of the harmonic rule or context that establishes the foundation for the remaining three tenets of the *harmonic narrative model*. The impact and effect of the omnipotent harmonic context can be seen in all the other areas of this model, making it the paramount tenet within the *harmonic narrative model*. As it is with any construct or rule within the creative realm, the effectiveness and implementation of the rule depends on two important factors: 1) the ease of one's ability to adhere and follow the rule; 2) the ease of deviating from it. In the bebop idiom the Tin Pan Alley harmonic contexts clearly provided a vehicle for both.

[52] The usefulness of the Tin Pan Alley chord patterns and their propensity for increasing the feeling of forward movement that is necessary for the musical narrative I am illustrating is found, in large part, within the voice-leading. This will be discussed further in part IV of this section.

[53] In a class at the New School of Music in 1990 the pianist Kenny Werner described the blues in a similar way.

Iconoclasm and Popular Song

The harmonic deviation from the musical rules or conventions that was endemic to the iconoclastic bebop style may account for some of the unpopularity of jazz. When the melodic ideas are either too complex or appear to be misaligned with the harmonic context, a common occurrence in the bebop vernacular, the outcome seems to possess a lack of synchronization and/or congruity. When conveying musical ideas using a relatively high quotient of unpredictable material the experience, for many listeners, can be unsatisfying. If a harmonic narrative is abandoned due to a series of melodic blunders by the improviser the thread that has captivated the listener may be lost entirely. On many occasions the melodic fragments endemic to the bebop vernacular are left partially if not completely unfinished or unresolved: exciting to some but frustrating and unsatisfying to many. Bebop improvisations require patience from both the improviser and the audience.

The partial success[54] or inconsistency of many improvisations in the bebop style may further contribute to a listeners dissatisfaction. Conversely, the proliferation of Western popular music and culture, is a direct result of what Leonard Meyer refers to as the fulfillment of the listener's "expectation"[55] or the predictability of the desired outcome. This consistency may help to account for the popularity and universal appeal of some musical genres.

[54] Arguably many of the musical narratives in the bebop style were only partially successful.
[55]Meyer, Leonard B. *Emotion and Meaning in Music,* The University of Chicago Press, 1956 p. 44.

The bebop generation of musicians from the 1940s played in a vernacular musical style that was unprecedented and many listeners (and older musicians) were unacquainted with its sonic characteristics. Due to the ephemeral and iconoclastic nature of the harmonic narratives, endemic to bebop, grasping their musical vernacular was for many like 'catching a tiger by the tail' : as soon as you feel you have an understanding of what is there, it's gone or it changes. Bebop is an expression of artistic freedom that became, and to some degree remains a "cultist"[56] or 'members only' club despite what I argue is actually a far reaching cultural inclusivity.

The influence of this iconoclastic and ephemeral musical style of self-expression, albeit within an extremely conservative harmonic context, can be seen in the approaches of many of the jazz musicians that inherited and further developed the bebop sensibility. The extent to which this musical iconoclasm affected the musicians who came in the wake of the bebop movement is immeasurable, a musical lineage that includes musicians in the second wave of bebop such as Art Farmer, Sonny Clarke, Hank Mobley, Sonny Rollins, Blue Mitchell et al. This generation of beboppers continued to employ manageable chordal patterns (contexts) based on the Tin Pan Alley structures for their extemporizations in order to facilitate their individual harmonic narratives.

[56] Baraka, Amiri. *Blues People.* Harper Collins, New York, 1963, p. 192.

Free Association

The linear quality that can be found in an improviser's flow of ideas was, in the bebop genre, a direct result of the inner logic of the 'tried and tested' Tin Pan Alley harmonic contexts. The capricious navigation of these contexts was in part accomplished through the act of 'free association', the success of which relied on the harmonic context which in many respects functioned both as the creative (melodic) fodder and as a safety net.[57] In other words, if the improviser simply 'made the changes' to any given Tin Pan Alley tune through an illustration of the chordal movement then the harmonic narrative, no matter how melodically weak or unclear , would be passable. Thus a poor if not forgettable melodic idea could be redeemed simply by possessing a perceptible degree of logic and harmonic flow.

The 'bar' for what constitutes a successful harmonic narrative in the bebop idiom was arguably set by the improvisations of Charlie Parker. Through his artistic vision, ingenuity and fearless negotiating of these contexts Parker altered the course of improvised music. As a result, the acceptable standard of simply playing through the harmonic context correctly or the act of simply 'making the changes', became insufficient. The flow that is endemic to Parker's music and to the bebop style was realized in part through the process of musical 'free association' albeit with the aforementioned safety net in place, to catch you if and when you

[57] The voice-leading movement within these contexts could enable a highly digressional and unfocused harmonic narrative to become passable or even effective.

fall. The *melodic transplant experiment* was in part designed to reveal how the capricious altering of pitches within Parker's melodic ideas reveals this freely associative approach.

Beyond Category and Melodic Inclusivity

The diversity of melodic material comprising the bebop vernacular is essentially boundless or in the words of Edward Kennedy Ellington: "beyond category."[58] Melodic ideas in the bebop vernacular can be constructed using many different styles, genres or aesthetic qualities to create a vast array musical ideas: some of which may of seem quite disparate. Charlie Parker's musical approach exemplifies this high level of melodic inclusivity. There seems to be no clear point where his style or acceptable content begins or ends. Parker's ability to allude to or include other styles without being imitative or musically incongruous was uncanny. An improviser could play virtually any melodic idea within the bebop style so long as the context was tangible and the flow of the harmonic narrative was present.

[58] A paraphrase of the famous Duke Ellington quote: an accolade he would offer to only the greatest musicians. Ellington would describe them as being "beyond category."

Summary

These various points about the harmonic context are important because of its key role in the melodic ideas within the bebop style. The extent to which the Tin Pan Alley chord progressions have influenced the bebop vernacular and the harmonic narratives is immeasurable. Conversely, the influence of ragtime music, blues and early jazz would also have had a profound effect on the Tin Pan Alley composers. This unquantifiable conflation between cultures and artistic expression speaks directly to the ideology and the cultural inclusivity of jazz.

The next section of the *harmonic narrative model* discusses how the obligation of operating 'inside' or 'outside' the context informs the crux of the bebop improviser's behavior and approach.

IV: II The Harmonic Obligation

The harmonic obligation is a critical and defining stage in the process of developing a successful narrative within the bebop vernacular. The parameters set for the obligation are established, to a large extent, by the previously discussed harmonic context. The harmonic obligation either compels the improviser to behave or act in strict adherence to the context or to deviate from it. Many of the harmonic narratives within the bebop style possess both these musical behaviors. These behaviors are guided by both the compulsion to create spontaneous narratives and the obligation to operate inside and outside the set parameters.

In any given context the parameters that are established by an obligation will influence and affect an individual's behaviour, the outcome of which is to some degree unknown. To revisit the hockey analogy for a moment: in a game of hockey the center iceman's objective is simple, viz., to score as many goals as possible, in sixty minutes of play, against the opposing team. In order to effectively do so one must *feel* the compulsion to win. To realize this aim, the player must also possess a degree of pragmatism: the *skills* required to implement a set of prearranged strategies. The execution of these strategies must, in large part, follow the rules of the game. If the rules are broken or deviated from to a negligible degree, the player will not be penalized, but if the behavior is deemed to be too far outside the acceptable range of deviation (a highly subjective judgment in music as well as in hockey) the penalties incurred may impede or interfere with the player's ability to realize the desired outcome: scoring as many goals as is

possible. The aim is to know how to move inside and outside the rules effectively in order to win the game.

Despite the expressive nature of music, a bebop improviser's goal of achieving a harmonic narrative may have also possessed a strong desire to succeed. This measured success, as discussed within the hockey analogy, is dependent on similar factors. If the behavior or approach lies too far outside the set parameters or rules, the ability to realize what is desired may be compromised. In a harmonic narrative such deviation may cause the inherent logic endemic to the (Tin Pan Alley) context to be lost, compromising the flow of the harmonic movement and in turn obscuring the narrative.

Due to the musical brevity that was exercised by many of the soloists within the bebop idiom the improvisations typically 'get to the musical (harmonic) point' quickly and effectively. In other words, the fulfillment of the obligation to illustrate the context must frequently be realized[59] in order for the harmonic narrative to flow. This compliance will in turn enable the improviser to more effectively deviate from the context if and when they choose to do so. The harmonic context that is being abstracted or deviated from is now well-established and apparent to the listener, making the harmonic deviation more effective. For example, in a story, the clarity of the plot or subject matter is imperative. This facilitates the multiplicity of avenues

[59] As I have previously discussed in Chapter I, the use of formulaic material is an effective means to expeditiously illustrate the harmonic context.

(either deviant or expected) that the author may choose to take in order to further the narrative.

Lastly, the strength of an improvisation within the bebop genre is dependent to a large degree on knowing how and when to abandon an idea that is *not* furthering the flow or the momentum of the harmonic narrative. Conversely, the improviser's ability to recognize when an idea *is* working and to capitalize on the idea is essential: exploiting the harmonic potential of a melodic idea to the fullest. When all else fails, the improviser must possess the wisdom to know when to simply rely on their default formulaic material and/or habit as a proven means to a consistent end.

The obligation's locale within the *harmonic narrative model* finds itself situated between the context and both the subject and the means. It is within this locale that much of the strategic planning takes place: where the decisions of how to proceed with the harmonic narrative are made, incubated and/or realized. This is the behavioral tenet within the model.

IV: III The Subject

"A narrative, is a story or an account of a series of events."[60] The events used for a narrative are known as subjects. Within the *harmonic narrative model,* the subject functions in a similar way to a noun within a sentence, albeit with a greater degree of flexibility. Within

[60] Collins online dictionary.

what I have been calling the harmonic narrative a musical "event" may be viewed from three different perspectives: 1) formulaic – melodic fragments that are a part of an improviser's vocabulary or "licks;" 2) motivic- "a theme or an idea that is often repeated throughout a piece of music;"[61] 3) subject based- the necessary pitches that illustrate the harmonic context.

The latter definition is the one that applies to the *harmonic narrative model* and fundamentally differs from formula and motives in a number of ways. Formula is a plan that is invented to deal with a particular problem (in this case a musical one). These repetitive melodic fragments allow the improviser to simply 'string together' a series of predetermined and possibly unrelated ideas. A motive typically occurs in compositional material but it has been observed by Schuller and Martin that it may also be a part of improvisations by Sonny Rollins and Charlie Parker.

My definition of the role or function of the subject is much simpler and offers what may be a more flexible design. Within the *harmonic narrative model,* the subject must simply consist of the necessary pitches that illustrate the context. In other words, the subject must align with the harmonic parameters defined by the context. In this manner, the melodic choices for a subject within a narrative in the bebop style are narrowed down considerably while still offering a high degree of melodic flexibility. [62] Now the improviser is not bound by elaborate,

[61] Collins online dictionary.

[62] An individual's ability to illustrate the harmony in the bebop style allows the improviser to more effectively deviate from it. If an idea is unclear from the outset, then the abstraction of said idea may be less effective.

cumbersome melodic tools and devices but instead has some clear pitches or harmonic markers that they can simply target.

For example, if the a chord within the harmonic context is Cmaj7, musicians in the bebop style will virtually always target some, if not all, of the given chord structure i.e. C, E, G and B.[63] Or if the progression moves from G7 (V7) to I (C) the voice-leading is typically spelled out by playing the seventh (F) to the third (E) respectively. This ensures that the subject within the musical narrative remains clear. This may be an oversimplification of how this 'rule' or tenet appears within the bebop vernacular, but I am presenting in this way because it is surprising how overlooked such a basic principle seems to be. Furthermore, the implications of such a basic concept are far reaching and essential to the current discussion.

The harmonic narrative will remain clear if the improviser constructs melodic ideas that consistently repeat and/or 'target' the subjects. By targeting the subjects, the improviser provides a clear destination for the melodic material. The surrounding melodic material that enables an improviser to target the subjects is comprised of many facets but is encapsulated within what I am calling the 'means' (discussed in further detail in the next chapter). A failure to consistently target the subjects, in a tonal improvisation, can often render the thread of a narrative lost or obscured (as discussed in part I of this model).

[63] I would argue that Parker's use of upper structures was conservative.

There are many examples of bebop musicians that successfully express harmonic narratives with alacrity but I would argue that Charlie Parker is an exemplar case. His melodic illustration of the subjects within his harmonic narratives is never short of being crystalline. The skillful manner with which a bebop improviser such as Charlie Parker targets the chosen subjects not only affirms and fulfills the harmonic obligation but further illustrates the context. This sets the stage for the capricious deviation common to the bebop vernacular, adding colour and interest to the harmonic narrative.

This discussion about Parker's use of the subjects can be seen in some respects as being consistent with Henry Martin's observations about Parker's motivic repetition and/or variation of melodic ideas. By applying Heinrich Schenker's method of analysis in order to illustrate the simple triadic structures that underlie Parker's music, Martin identifies the patterns of pitch (subject) repetition. Parker will often repeat himself, playing similar phrases and/or subjects on any given chord but this pitch targeting, as I have been referring to it, leads Martin to conclude that there may be a motivic component to Parker's improvisations. I would argue that Parker's generation of musicians were not operating in a motivic sense, despite the inadvertent repetition of formulaic and/or thematic material, and that the perceived structure actually resulted from the crystalline illustration of the Tin Pan Alley contexts being used for the improvisation.

Furthermore, the triadic structures that Martin considers to be indicative of an underlying form does not account for many of the harmonic extensions that were endemic to

Bebop. Schenker's method precludes these extensions of harmony from being a part of the "background layer." Instead, such extensions are relegated to being fundamentally 'non-structural' or a part of the foreground material/layer. The *melodic transplant experiment* in chapter V reveals how the subjects can in fact be quite varied and not just triadic in nature.

Another essential reason for targeting the subjects of the context is to establish the logic necessary for the harmonic narrative to have the appearance that it is 'going somewhere' or 'telling a story'. In other words, the potential within the contexts and simple forms derived from the Tin Pan Alley tunes provides the harmonic narratives with the required structure and or perceived movement. As I mentioned in part one of this chapter these simple tunes also provide the creative fodder for an infinite number of highly varied melodic ideas to take place. The one consistent feature of these melodic ideas is that they are intended to increase the flow of the harmonic narrative.

By treating the subjects that are available for the melodic material as simply being an illustration of the context the malleability and the flexibility of ideas are increased immeasurably. From this perspective there are some similarities between the bebop vernacular and semantics, where any given idea may possess or indicate a number of different meanings and the success of an idea depends on an improviser's ability to make clear decisions and behave with clear intention. An inability to do so or a general lack of musical skill was described by the bebop generation as being 'jive'. The fortitude and skill required to decide unequivocally on how the subjects are to be used for the harmonic narrative or to 'commit' to an idea are

manifest in the improviser's vision and their musical identity. When these decisions are made the improviser will inevitably have to forgo and/or discard other possibilities: sometimes we are defined by what we are not going to do or in this case what we are not going to play.

To express a harmonic narrative effectively in the bebop vernacular an individual must possess one or more of these three strategies: 1) know what they are going to play beforehand; 2) have a clear vision or sense of they want to play; 3) be able to identify when they are playing something they can work with. In other words, an improvisation within the bebop vernacular can be scripted, developed with intention or inadvertently stumbled upon. I argue that it is the latter that embodies the true nature of jazz improvisation. When an improviser stumbles onto an idea that works, the idea is recognized, committed to and then sustained for the greatest duration possible. This is another possible explanation for the value of formula: using the familiar with the aim to discover and navigate the unchartered.

How the subject is targeted and handled within the context is realized through 'the means': the final tenet within the *harmonic narrative model.*

IV: IV The Means

The 'means' is multifaceted, comprising an amalgam of musical tools and devices. The flow within a musical narrative in the bebop style is in part a result of this amalgam. These musical devices cohere and bind the context, the obligation and most importantly the melodic

exposition of the subjects. Therefore, the means not only functions as the thread or glue that connects the subjects together but also contributes to the melodic/harmonic development of them.

Many of the devices I will be outlining within this section of the *harmonic narrative model* are common to and typical of most Western music. However, it is the manner in which they are used within the bebop vernacular that is of primary importance to this discussion. In keeping with this I have developed a new set of terminology for each device in order to reveal their unique role within the bebop vernacular.

The devices that comprise the 'means' as they appear within a harmonic narrative in the bebop vernacular are as follows:

1. The Setup
2. The Illustrator
3. The ABCs
4. The Connectors
5. The Blues Conversation (Part I) and the Blues Shout (Part II)

1. The Setup

The setup is many respects the equivalent of a musical anacrusis or the 'pickup' notes and occur at the beginning of the musical "sentence"[64] or as a lead in to the melodic ideas. In Parker's vernacular they typically happen very quickly, appearing in unexpected ways that set up surprise elements in the phrasing. Within the broader bebop idiom the anacrusis is often

[64] Schoenberg, Arnold. *The Fundamentals of Musical Composition.* Faber and Faber, 1967, p. 3.

executed using a flourish or as Barry Harris calls it a "glissando."[65] Dizzy Gillespie referred to this as "cramming."[66] These are melodic devices in which the notes and/or rhythmic groupings are often obscured by the rapid nature of these pick up phrases.

Setups can also be more obvious and traditional: individual notes that function simply as a lead into the phrase or a means often to target the subject. In this manner the setup note is similar to the definite article in grammar. In the solos of Charlie Parker these setups are quite often transcribed with varying degrees of accuracy. These seemingly innocuous notes, or as they are often manifest, 'ghost notes', are exceedingly difficult to identify (usually due to the poor recording quality and tuning discrepancies common to many of the bebop recordings). However, I argue that these setup notes are crucial to establishing the nature of the subject. The interval that is used to set up the subject not only contributes to the harmonic colour but also the perceived meaning.

2. The Illustrator

The illustrator is in many ways the equivalent of an arpeggio in the bebop vernacular and functions as an expeditious means of musically describing (similar to an adjective) or illustrating the harmony. It differs from an arpeggio in the traditional sense because it can take

[65] I first heard this term when I was attending Barry Harris' improvisatory workshops in New York City in 1995.

[66] This is when a collection of notes either chromatic or scalar are 'crammed' together often a-rhythmically but with a clear direction targeting a subject note.

on many forms: inverted, partially outlined etc. Within the bebop vernacular this device is typically found in a series of single notes that are often more harmonic than melodic in nature. The opening bass line and the melody of Dizzy Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia" (c. 1945) exemplify this device.

The illustrator is frequently used by Parker both in the middle of a phrase or, more typically, as an opening musical gesture to his phrases (essentially functioning more as a setup). It is distinctly possible that Charlie Parker's 8-12 hours a day of isolated practice led him to the frequent use of this device due to its highly expeditious means of defining the harmonic context, sans accompaniment. He could accompany himself by clearly outlining the harmony and then capriciously form melodic/harmonic ideas. Notwithstanding Parker's objection to the 'accusation' that there is a European influence in his music the solo works of Johann Sebastian Bach[67] rely heavily the similar types of chordal outlines.[68]

[67] J.S. Bach's *Suites à Violoncello Solo senza Basso* (BWV 1007-1012).

[68] In Parker's music, the arpeggio is unique in that it is often played as a triplet figure or a double time sixteenth note figure. This further increases the rhythmic flow of the musical narrative. It can also be the defining harmonic element possessing only 'subject' notes.

3. The ABCs

The ABCs are the most rudimentary form of harmonic and melodic information: scales. These devices function as an effective tool that can be used to consistently define and establish the broader harmonic context. They also reveal the subtle and the more overt shifts within the harmonic functions and/or modulations, albeit with far less efficiency than the illustrator. ABCs are also key contributors to the perceived flow or movement within a given melodic line: they possess the most primary form of voice-leading.[69] This is due to their stepwise motion or what George Russell refers to as their "horizontal"[70] attributes. The running of scalar material (ABCs) in the manner of Art Tatum or John Coltrane however, was far less frequent in the bebop vernacular of the 1940's. In the case of Charlie Parker such passages were typically interspersed with varying degrees of chromaticism that contributed to his harmonic voice-leading. The frequency with which this device appears within the bebop vernacular is typically quite low.

4. The Connectors

The connectors are the chromaticism and more adventurous voice-leading elements within the bebop vernacular. This musical device can also be seen as being similar to a conjunction in grammar. In the bebop vernacular it is the fixative or binding agent that

[69] This is found in the ascending scale structure where there are two distinct leading tones that define the harmony. The leading tones establish the the I - IV cycle (e.g., C - F) and the V - I cycle (e.g., G - C).
[70] Russell, George. *River Walk,* 1961.

connects the melodic subjects and illustrates the voice-leading within the Tin Pan Alley contexts. Connectors are directly responsible for the sense of flow and movement within the harmonic narratives of Charlie Parker: he possessed impeccable voice-leading skills. In addition, these connectors (chromaticism) are essential for generating the available passing tones and neighbor or surround notes that help to define, shape and color the subjects.

5. The Blues Part I. The Blues Conversation

The blues scale that is built from the sixth degree of the major tonic key is the most commonly used device in American popular songs and within jazz improvisations from as early as the 1920s through to the 1940s. Used in this manner the blues scale is essentially a major pentatonic scale with the addition of a flattened third. This scale is 'melodic' in the European sense due to the congruency of the pitches with the functions of tonic (I), subdominant (IV) and dominant (V) harmonic structures. It can also be 'bluesy' in the African-American sense with or without the altered tone depending on the vernacular with which the scale is expressed. The pentatonic scale that lies at the heart of the blues scale is another highly expeditious means of establishing a tonal centre due to it possessing both the tonic major and relative minor triads from its point a derivation.

The Blues Part II. The Blues Shout

This is the more traditional use of the blues scale where it is constructed from the root of any given key. This scale possesses many melodic pitches that are incongruent to the key from which it is derived. In the bebop vernacular this scale is often expressed, melodically, as a declamatory phrase which finds its origins in the blues and gospel music traditions throughout the southern US: the 'field-holler'. The manner in which this type of declamatory blues expression appears within the bebop vernacular tends to be more understated than the typical usage found within the blues and gospel music traditions.

The bebop generation's approach to this blues scale was in many respects consistent with Charlie Parker's approach which was born out of the Midwestern, Kansas City school of blues playing. This style of blues playing was a little softer and sweeter than many of the other blues styles and can be heard in the singing of Jimmy Rushing and in the playing of Lester Young, Count Basie, Buck Clayton, et al. These blues shouts are one of the only harmonic areas of the bebop musical vernacular that tangibly reference the feel and sensibility of the gospel traditions or the Sanctified Church. Dizzy referred to the jazz rhythms that were rooted in this musical tradition as the "Sanctified beat."[71]

Due to the multi-faceted and ubiquitous role of the means within the *harmonic narrative model* one can see two important resultant musical implications: 1) the manner in

[71] Maggin, Donald L. *Dizzy: The Life and Times of John Birks Gillespie.* It Books; Reprint edition (March 28, 2006), p. 12.

which the harmonic context is expounded upon; 2) how the subjects rely on the means for their contextual meaning.

The following chapter illustrates how the *harmonic narrative model* was used to conduct the *melodic transplant experiment.*

Chapter V: The Melodic Transplant

Introduction

"The rhythm of Parker's solos was so strong you could almost add any notes to them and they would still be great."[72]

In the early 1950's George Russell introduced a theory of harmony that was rooted in the importance of the Lydian scale, or the scale built from the subdominant of any major key. Russell's theories were apparently influenced by the bebop generation of musicians. In his book, The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization or the LCC, Russell evolves all the remaining scale types by using the Lydian scale as the basis for his theory of harmonic functions. On pages 160-167 of Russell's book he conducts an analysis of Coleman Hawkins' seminal solo on the Johnny Green composition from 1930, "Body and Soul." The method used to perform this analysis is derived from the rules Russell had established through his new concept of tonal harmony or the LCC. To elucidate his theories further he used his structural observations and theories that he refers to as "tonal gravity" and the "vertical and horizontal" [73]

[72] Paul Berliner. *Thinking in Jazz, The Infinite Art of Jazz Improvisation. 1994,* Berliner is quoting an unknown source p. 244.

[73] From the George Russell article, *The River Trip* (1961), where he identifies Lester Young as an example of a horizontal improviser and Coleman Hawkins as an example of a vertical improviser.

melodic approaches. This piqued my interest and spurred me on to revisit my analytical theories on some of the great improvisers of the 1930's and 40's.

After investigating Russell's ideas a little further I discovered his analysis of Charlie Parker's solo on "Oh!, Lady be Good"[74] from a concert in 1946 with the Norman Granz aggregation, Jazz at The Philharmonic (JATP)[75]. Steve Larson has also offered his analytical insights into this solo by Parker. Larson attempts to uncover the previously discussed background structural layers to ultimately reveal the presence of rhetorical meaning.

Having reviewed these efforts to analyse Charlie Parker's solo on "Oh, Lady be Good" I decided it was necessary to readdress the melodic and more specifically the harmonic attributes that lay within this solo.[76] My method for analysis drew upon the four tenets of the *harmonic narrative model*. The execution of this experiment was carried out in two parts: 1) identify how the *harmonic narrative model* manifests in Parker's solo; 2) forge new melodic ideas that use this model as the basis to replace the original ones. In order to isolate the implications of harmonic and melodic features within this solo I did not alter the rhythm or phrasing in any way.

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[74] Composed by George and Ira Gershwin in 1926.

[75] The JATP was an aggregation that had a revolving door of personnel and presented to a concert audience what was intended to be an outsiders' window into the "Jam Session" culture. The jam session was essential to jazz: creating an environment that incubated and helped form much of the vernacular still used today.

[76] Why this solo has received so much analytical attention is surprising for I would not deem it to be a 'standout' performance by Parker.

The primary objectives of the *melodic transplant* experiment were as follows:

1. To provide further tools for musical analyses within the bebop vernacular.
2. To recompose Parker's solo in order to reveal the malleability of his ideas.
3. To assess whether Parker's melodic ideas were of lesser import than the harmony (from which his melodic ideas may originate).
4. To test the efficacy of the *harmonic narrative model*.
5. To assess whether there is a harmonic narrative within the solo.
6. If there is a tangible narrative would the perceived meaning or flow remain despite such significant melodic alterations?
7. Would the five re-compositions sound like Parker solos?
8. Could the hierarchy of harmony, melody and rhythm within Parker's musical vernacular be established?

During the course of this experiment I not only followed the conceptual rules and parameters set by the *harmonic narrative model,* but was further guided by my knowledge of harmony. Most importantly however, I was informed by my familiarity with Parker's vernacular style. The use of my *a priori* knowledge was essential to retaining the "conversational logic" and the flow of the melodic ideas. Therefore, the method used was not simply an arbitrary or 'ad hoc' selection of replacement pitches using the *harmonic narrative model,* but resulted also from my harmonic knowledge, musical intuition and understanding of Parker's vernacular style.

It could be said that my approach was indicative of a 'confirmation bias', which compromised the outcome. However, in a subjective endeavour such as this, an understanding of what the vernacular 'should' sound like is not only helpful but imperative. No matter how effective the pedagogy of jazz becomes an understanding of what the music 'should' sound like is essential. This can only come from learning the music through an oral tradition: whence jazz originates.

The use of this *a priori* knowledge of Parker's style and musical vernacular is further explained in an event that Paul Berliner illustrates in his book, *Thinking in Jazz.* The story, as Berliner tells it, explains how Barry Harris[77] conducted an experiment with some students during one of his weekly workshops (I used to attend these workshops in the 1990s). On this occasion (for which I was not present!) Harris gave five students a musical rule and asked them to construct a melodic idea using the rule. There were four successful efforts and one that failed. The student who had failed objected to Harris' disapproval and contested that 'he had followed the given rule' and that the melodic idea he presented abided by the parameters Harris had set and therefore was correct. Harris conceded that this was accurate but went on to say; "I have been listening to this music for over forty years now, and my ears tell me that phrase would be wrong to play… Art is not a science my son."[78]

[77] Barry Harris' musical concept is deeply rooted in the Parker tradition.
[78] Berliner, Paul. *Thinking in Jazz.* Chicago University Press, 1994, p. 249.

V: I The Experiment

This section discusses how some of the more notable musical events within Parker's solo on "Oh, Lady Be Good" were imperative in determining what harmonic devices were being used and goes on to explain how the *harmonic narrative model* appears in the score, both in Parker's solo and in the five re-compositions.

The 'blues conversation' is the melodic tool most frequently employed by Parker in this solo, occurring in bars 1-3, 7-8, 11-12, 14-16, 19, 24-27, 32-36, 47-48, 57-58. The ubiquitous usage of this device clearly defines the bulk of the melodic and harmonic color within the solo. The 'blues shout' is most often used by Parker when he plays the blues[79] however within this solo the 'blues shout' occurs with limited frequency: happening in bars 9-10, 17-18, 59-60.

One of the more deviant harmonic features within this solo occurs on the seventh bar of the 'channel'[80] where Parker substitutes for the D7 being played by the rhythm section with the tritone substitution of what is commonly known as the 'V of V' harmony. Parker plays an Eb7 over the D7 chord which essentially treats the V7 as a ii7 (bar 7 of the channel). In this case Parker replaces the II7 (A7) with the bVI7 (E-flat7) by using the tritone substitution of II. Furthermore, the chords played on the channel by both the rhythm section and Parker are not consistent with Gershwin's original harmonic context. On this recording the harmony in bars 4-

[79] Parker often did not play blues figures when improvising on the Tin Pan Alley harmonic contexts.

[80] A term that was used in Parker's day to describe what is commonly known today as the 'bridge'.

5 of the channel moves from the VI7 (E7) directly to the II7 (A7) whereas in the original chordal pattern the modulation in bar five moves to the relative minor.

The most notable melodic or formulaic material appears in the phrase that concludes the first chorus in a series of descending arpeggiated gestures (bars 28-30). This phrase also crops up a year later, both on the 'master' version of "Ornithology"[81] and a live version (recorded by Dean Benedetti); but on these occasions the phrase is displaced with the dotted quarter or hemiola rhythmic grouping. In the solo in question the phrase appears in a rhythmically simplified format, using eighths and sixteenths in a two beat phrasing style. The point of interest in this phrase lies in the voice-leading and in the type of bV or tritone substitute harmony being used by Parker. Instead of the obvious Ab7 over a D7 Parker plays Abmaj7. Re-compositions 3, 4, and 5 use the subdominant minor substitution instead of the tritone; within the family of diminished structures, from which the tritone substitution is derived, these are both considered interchangeable or harmonic equivalents. Parker does use this subdominant minor substitution in the original solo but in a different place: the end of bar 40 leading into the second A section of the second chorus.

Arguably the last significant event within this solo is found in the long sequences of double-time phrases, which are all but absent until the second chorus. It is possible that Parker is using such double-time devices to build the intensity of the solo. However, this type of

[81] Composed by "Little" Benny Harris, 1947.

musical ‘buildup’ was in fact atypical of Parker’s style, and to much of the bebop vernacular. Typically, there were subtle shifts in the intensity and dynamics but not the rising trajectory to reach a ‘fever pitch’: a crowd pleasing gesture that was/is used in less subtle musical vernaculars. The rising intensity by Parker is achieved by an increase in the density and velocity of his melodic ideas. However, the rhythm and phrase elements lie outside of the parameters of *harmonic narrative model* and therefore are not addressed in this paper.

How the four tenets of the *harmonic narrative model* appear in the *melodic transplant experiment* is outlined in the following:

The Context

The harmonic context, as it is being played by the rhythm section, is revealed on the bottom staff of the score. Above Parker’s original solo and above each of the five re-compositions the harmonic context is further illustrated in accordance with the harmony being illustrated by the melodic ideas (this essential to the harmonic obligation and/or deviation). In order to establish the harmonic context being used by Parker, I made a series of calculated/informed assumptions. I cannot claim to ‘know what Parker was thinking’, but in order to perform this experiment I had to use two key pieces of harmonic information: 1) the harmonic context illustrated by the rhythm section; 2) the harmonic context as it is being illustrated by Parker’s melodic ideas.

The Harmonic Obligation

This tenet is essentially behavioral and establishes the manner in which the other three tenets within the model are executed. Furthermore, this is where Parker's *modus operandi* either fulfills the obligation to the harmonic context or deviates from it. Readers will see Parker's harmonic approach if they compare the harmonic structure within Parker's melodic ideas with the harmonic context being played by the rhythm section.

The Subject

The subjects are highlighted in **Green**

As with virtually all his improvising, Parker's targeting of the subjects throughout this solo on "Oh! Lady be Good" is exemplary. The subjects that are targeted within the original solo and the re-compositions typically appear as the root, thirds and sevenths: the fifths and ninths tend to be more ambiguous as subjects but nevertheless appear with some frequency (particularly on the re-compositions and in bars 25-27 of the original solo). Parker's use of the thirteenth is common, but I would argue that its function is actually that of a sixth. I am making this distinction between the thirteenth and the sixth because in many of the phrases it appears as a part of the pentatonic scale or blues scale. From another perspective the thirteenth could also be viewed as the root of the relative minor and the ninth could be seen as the second. The thirteenth does appear with absolute certainty in bar 21 in the ii7 chord. However, excessive

and unnecessary discussion of ‘pitch semantics’ and their functions is tangential to the task at hand.

The Means

The Setups are highlighted in **grey.**

The Illustrators are highlighted in **Red.**

The ABCs are indicated in **Black.**

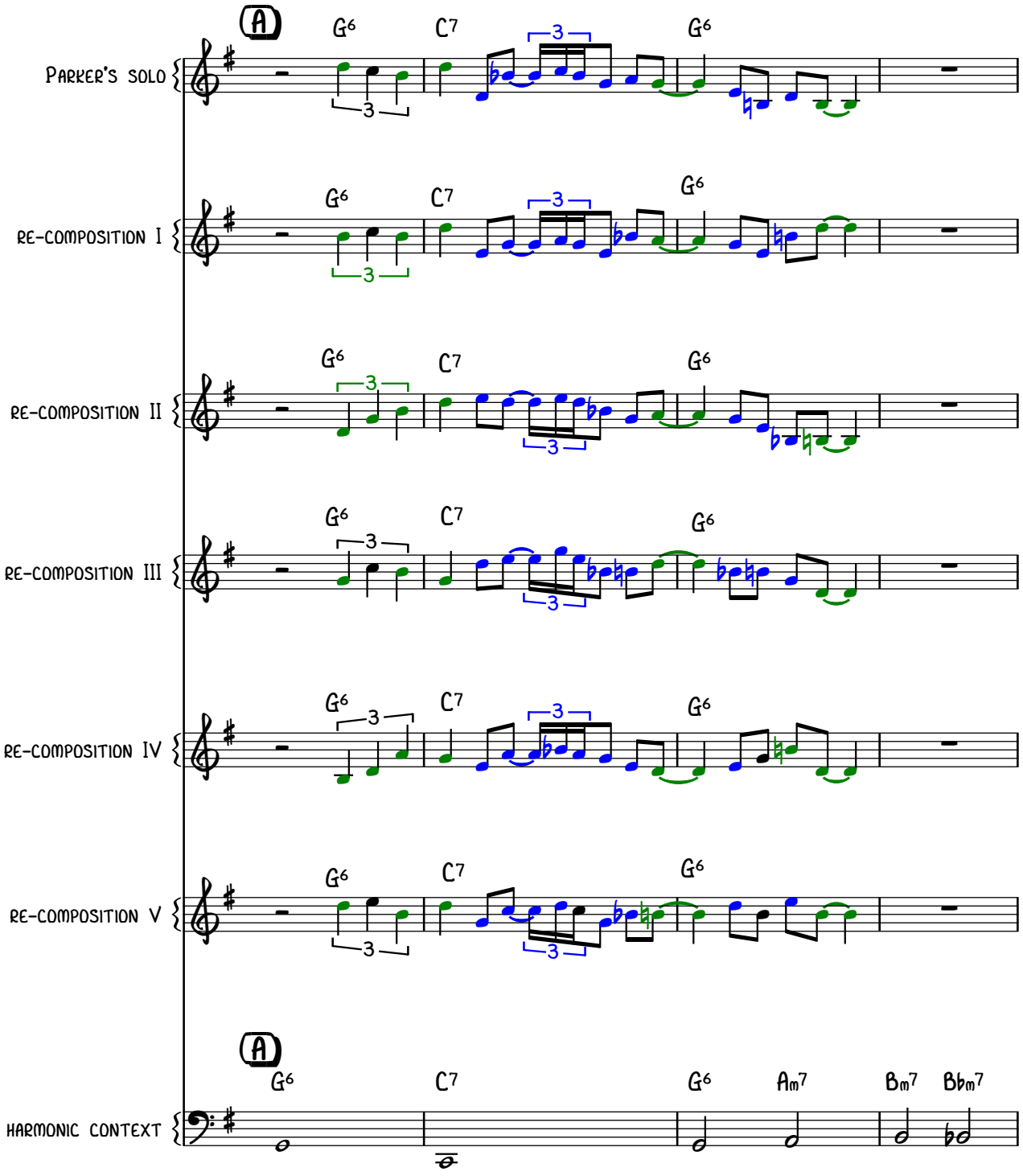
The Connectors are highlighted in **Orange.**

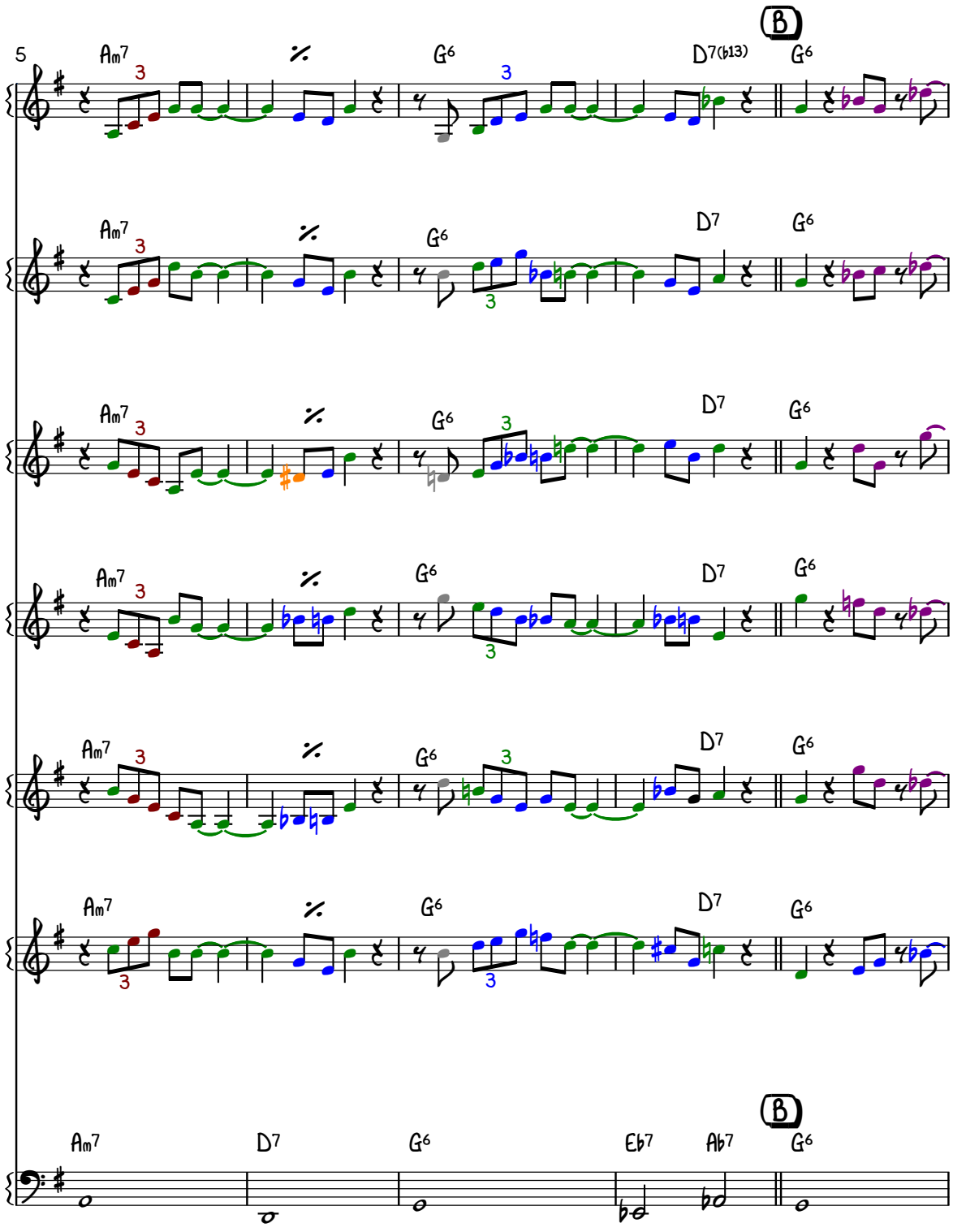
The Blues Conversation is highlighted in light Blue**.**

The Blues Shout is highlighted in **Purple.**

This paper does not present a ‘play by play’ of each of the harmonic events within this experiment (with the exception of the aforementioned). The color codes, re-compositions and chord symbols are designed to illustrate these features. If the reader possesses an understanding of harmony these events will be perfectly self-evident, but if not, the ‘play by play’ will be of no further assistance. Lastly, since it is the flow of the harmonic narrative that is being discussed it is recommended that the reader listen to the audio CD while reviewing the musical score irrespective of their level of harmonic understanding.

V: II Analysis and the Five Re-compositions

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Am7
G6
D7(♭13)
G6
B
Am7
G6
D7
G6
Am7
G6
D7
G6
Am7
G6
D7
G6
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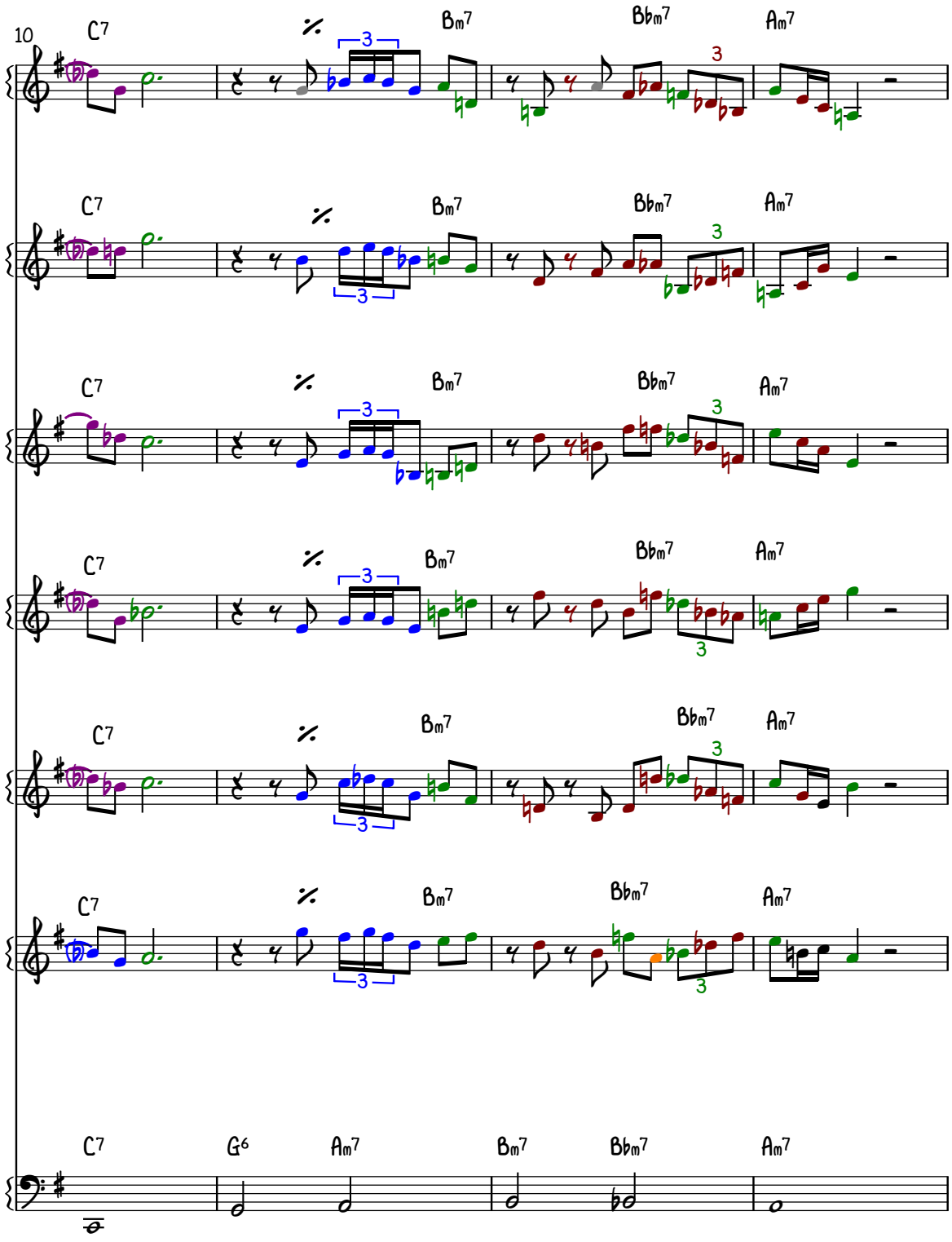
Am7
D7
G6
Eb7
Ab7
G6
B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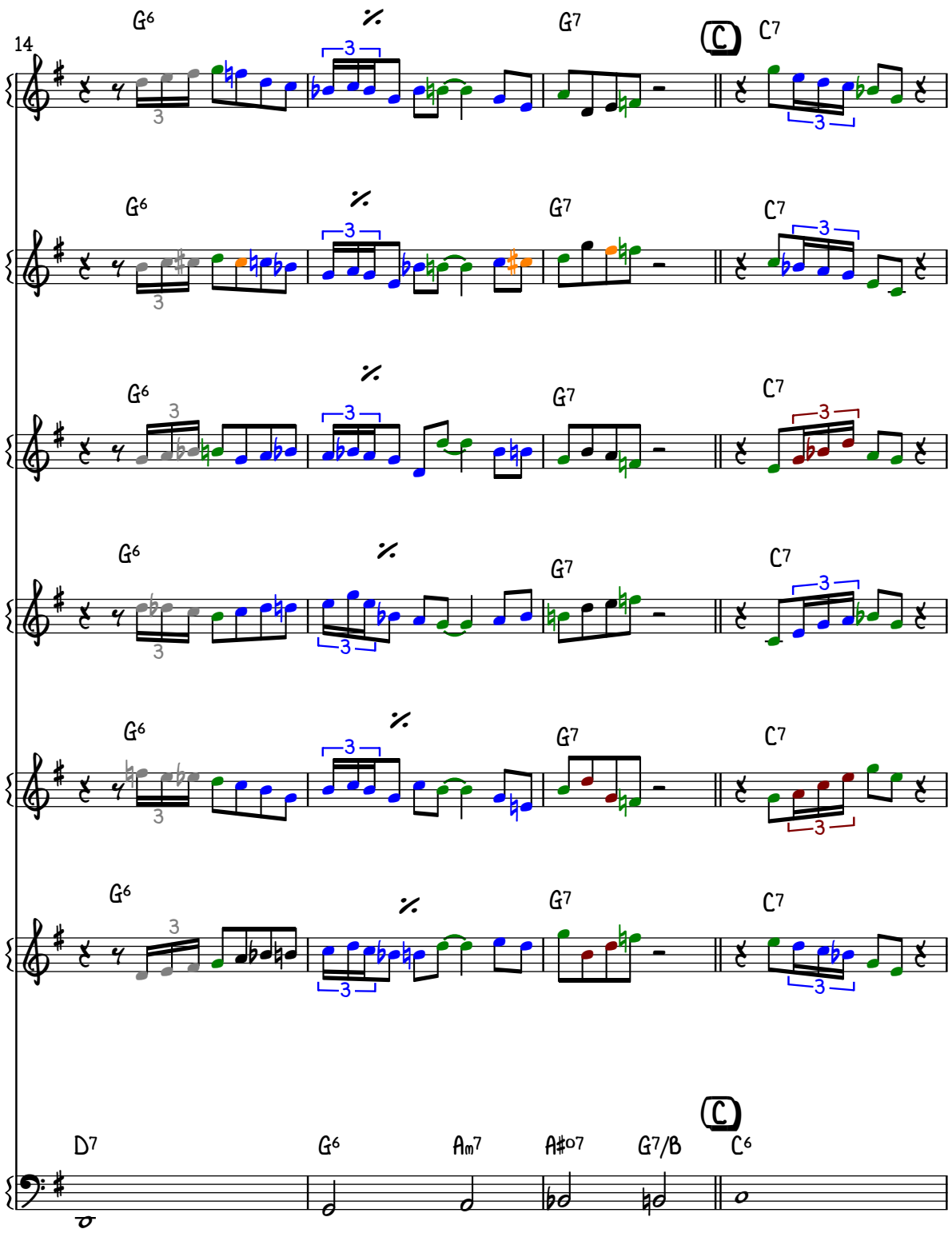
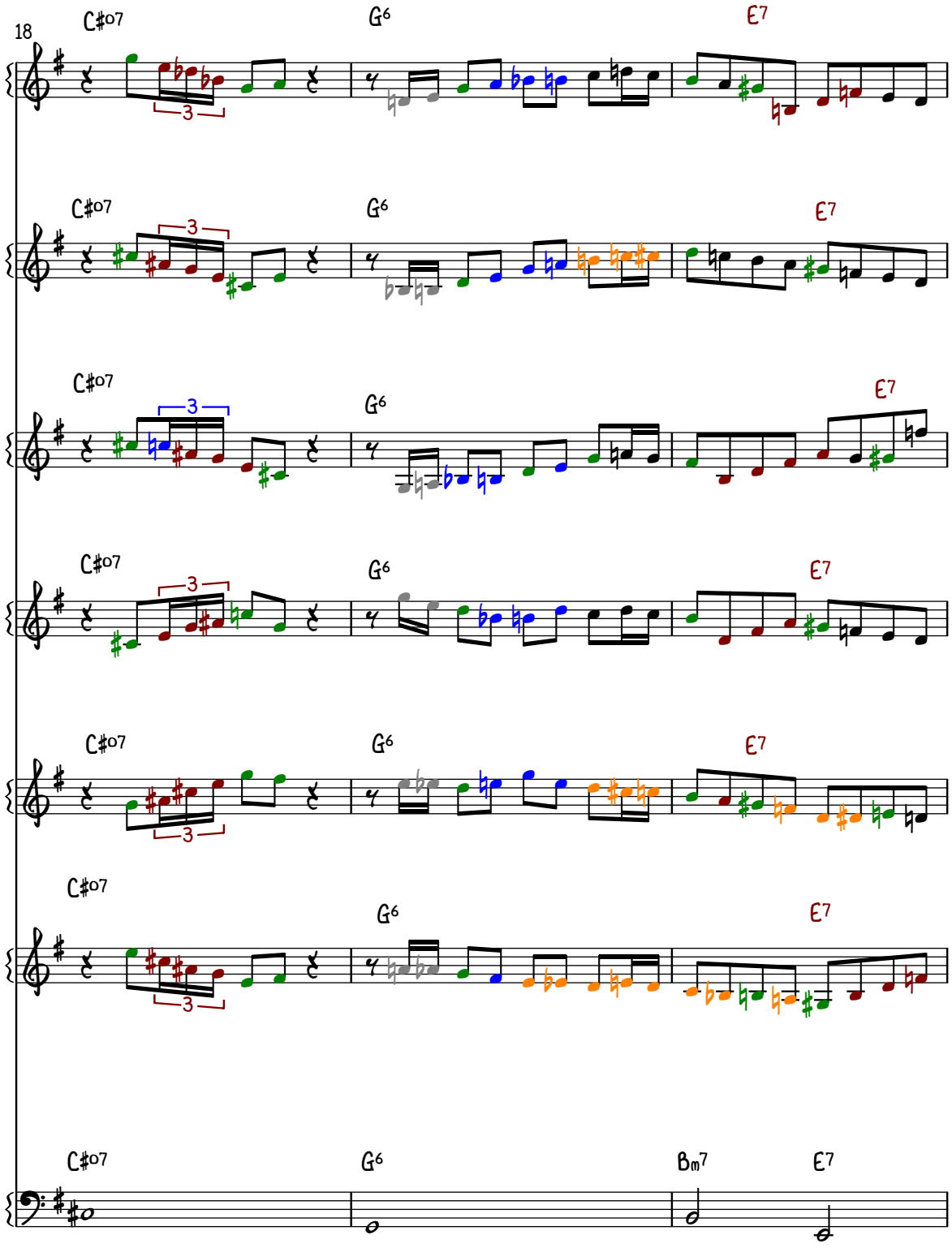
C7
Bm7
Bbm7
Am7
G6


14
G6
G7
C7
D7
G6
Am7
A#o7
G7/B
C6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G6
E7
C♯o7
G6
E7
C♯o7
G6
E7
C♯o7
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C♯o7
G6
E7
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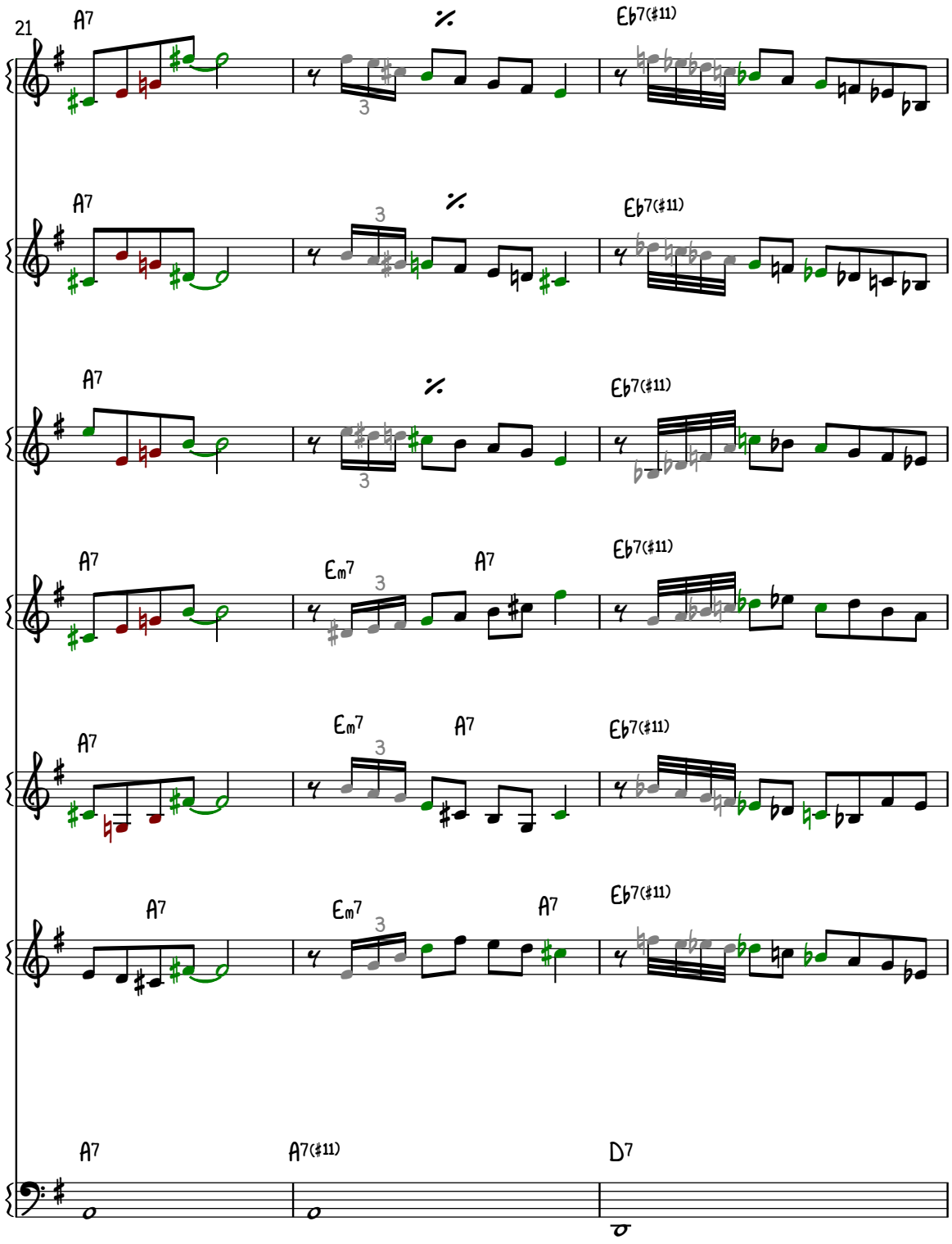
G6
E7
C♯o7
G6
Bm7
E7


21
A7
Eb7(♯11)
A7
Eb7(♯11)
A7
Eb7(♯11)
A7
Em7
A7
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A7
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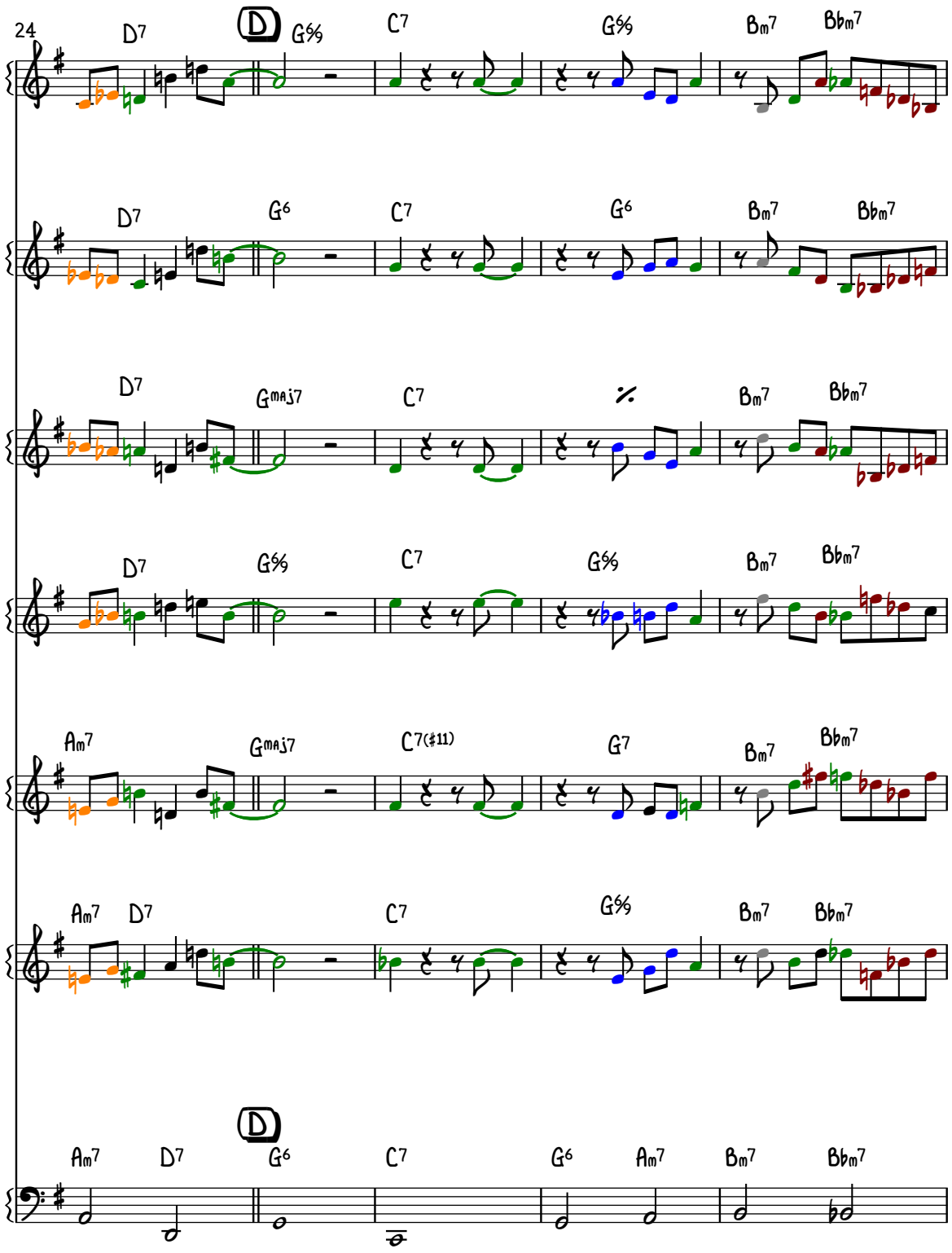
Eb7(♯11)
A7
A7(♯11)
D7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D7
G%
C7
G%
Bm7
Bbm7
D7
G6
C7
G6
Bm7
Bbm7
D7
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C7
%
Bm7
Bbm7
D7
G%
C7
G%
Bm7
Bbm7
Am7
Gmaj7
C7(#11)
G7
Bm7
Bbm7
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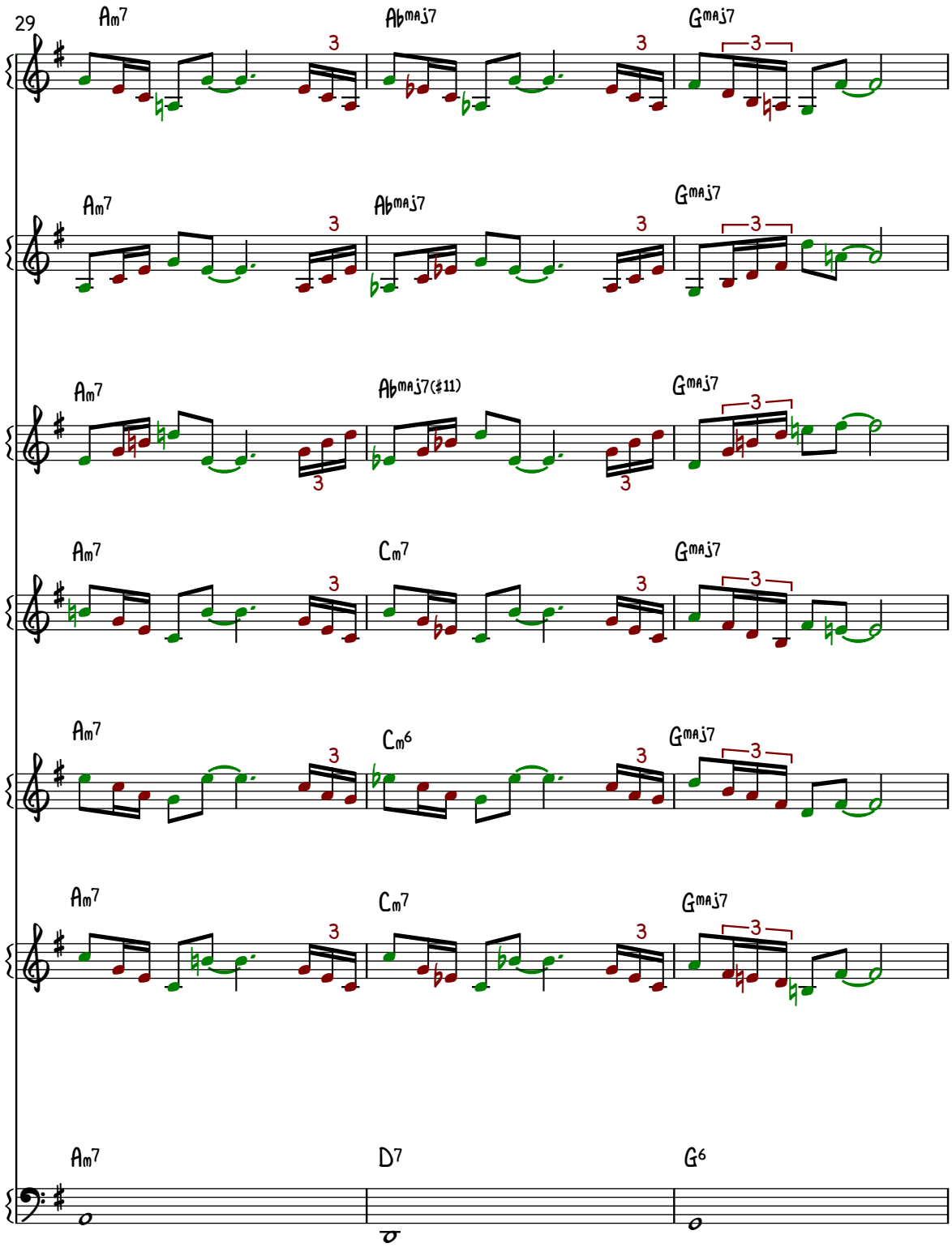
D7
G6
C7
G6
Am7
Bm7
Bbm7


29
Am7
Abmaj7
Gmaj7
Am7
Abmaj7
Gmaj7
Am7
Abmaj7(♯11)
Gmaj7
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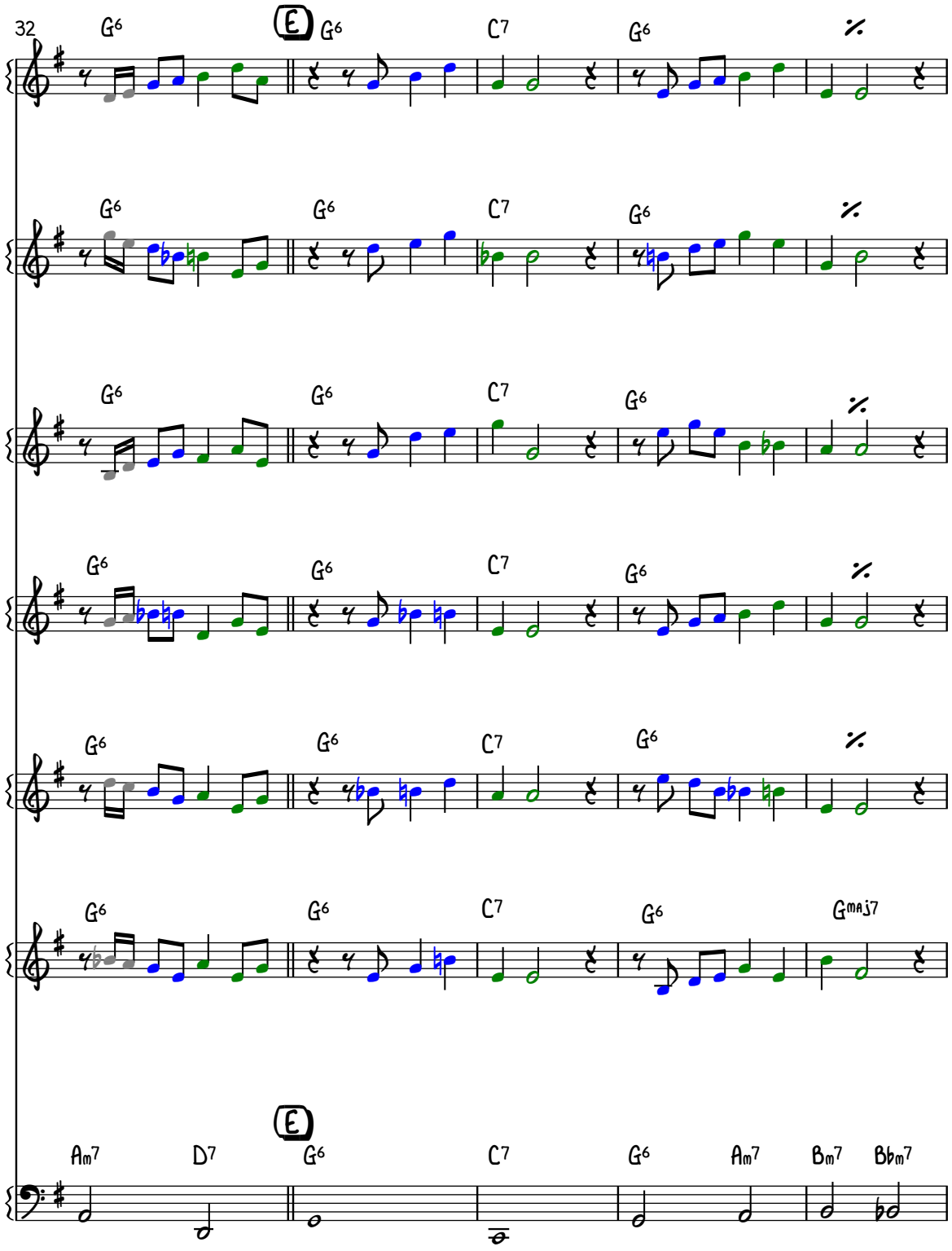
Gmaj7
Am7
Cm6
Gmaj7
Am7
Cm7
Gmaj7
Am7
D7
G6


32
G6
E
G6
C7
G6
G6
G6
C7
G6
G6
G6
C7
G6
G6
G6
C7
G6
G6
G6
C7
G6
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G6
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E
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D7
G6
C7
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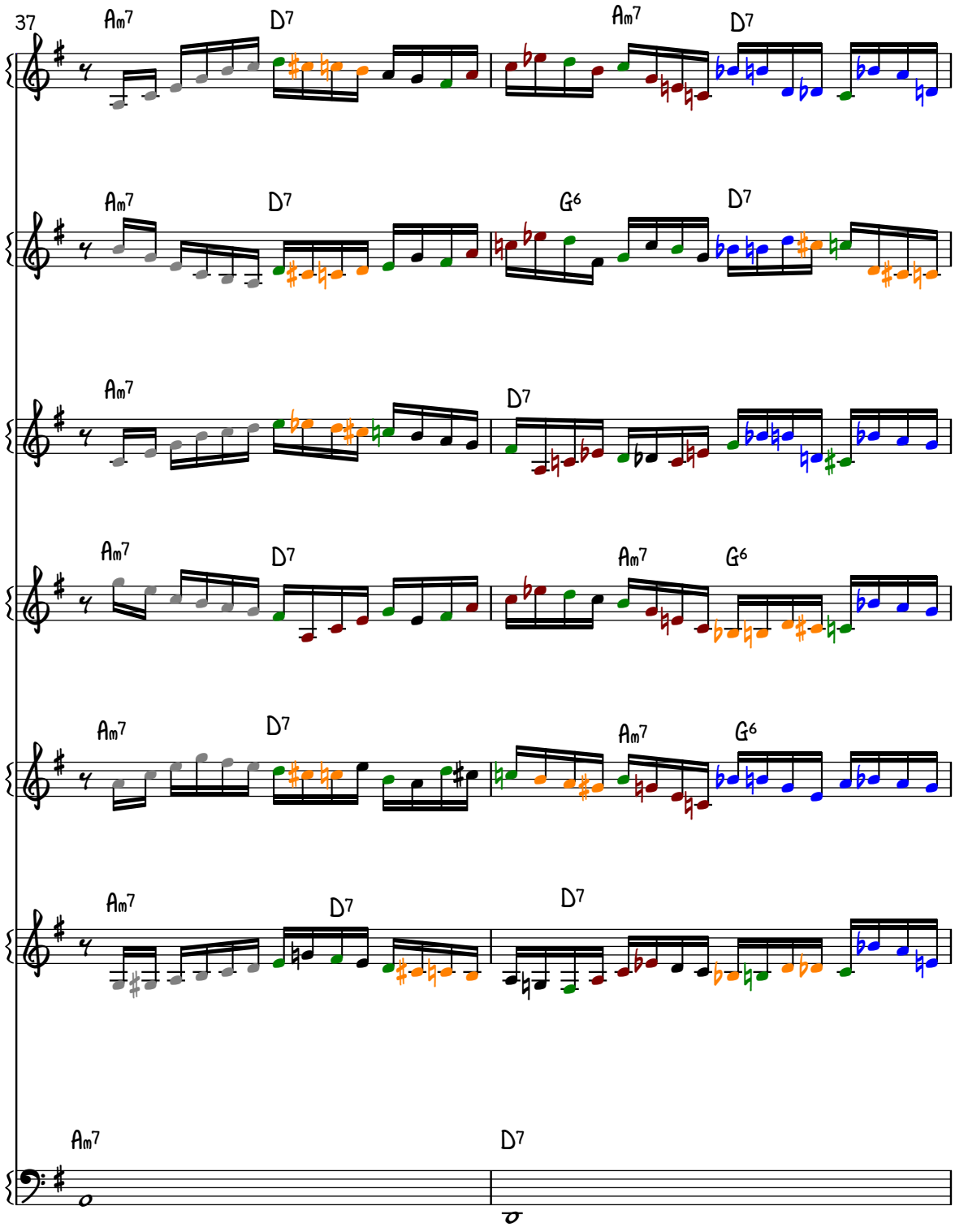
Bbm7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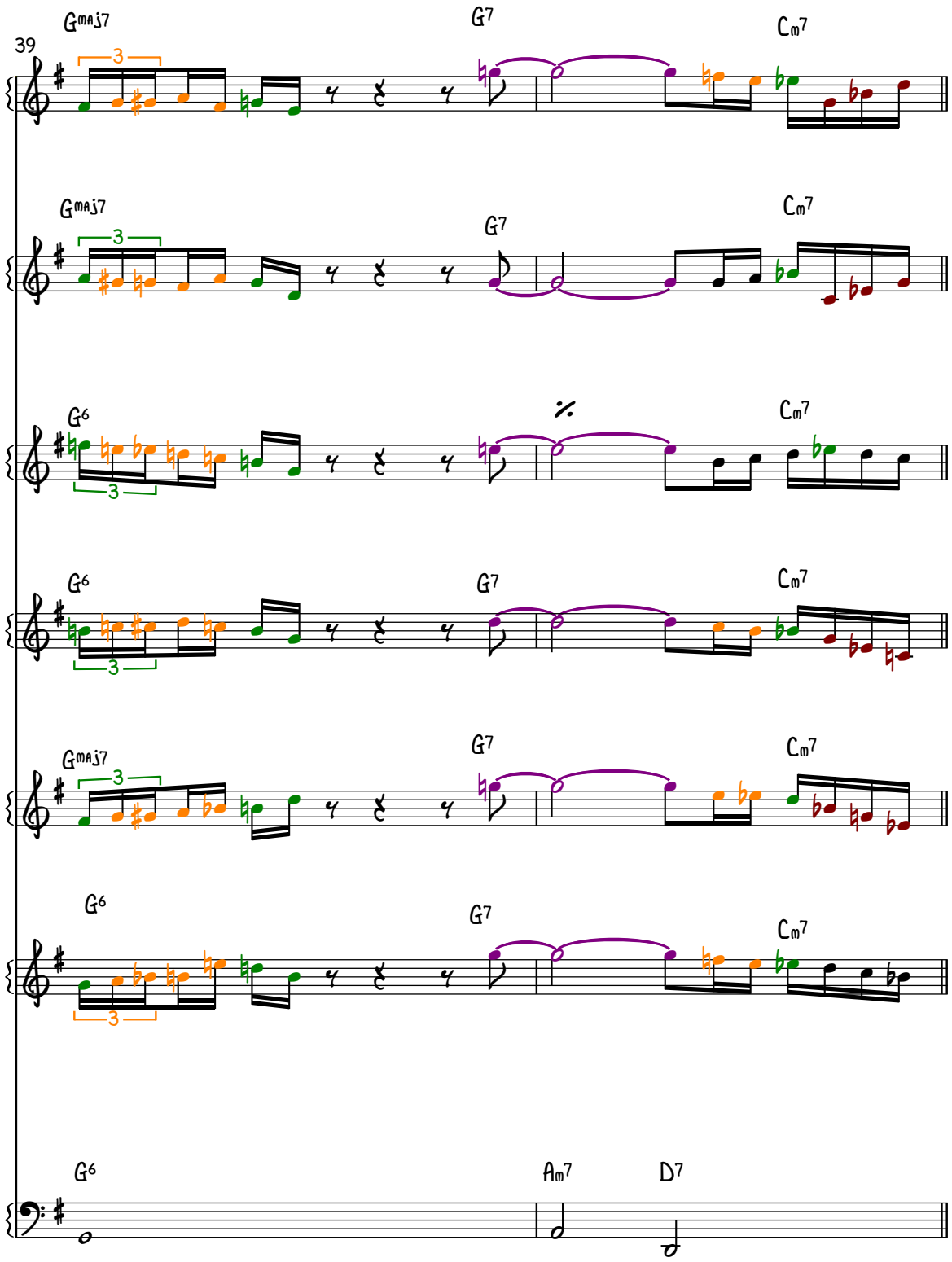
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G7
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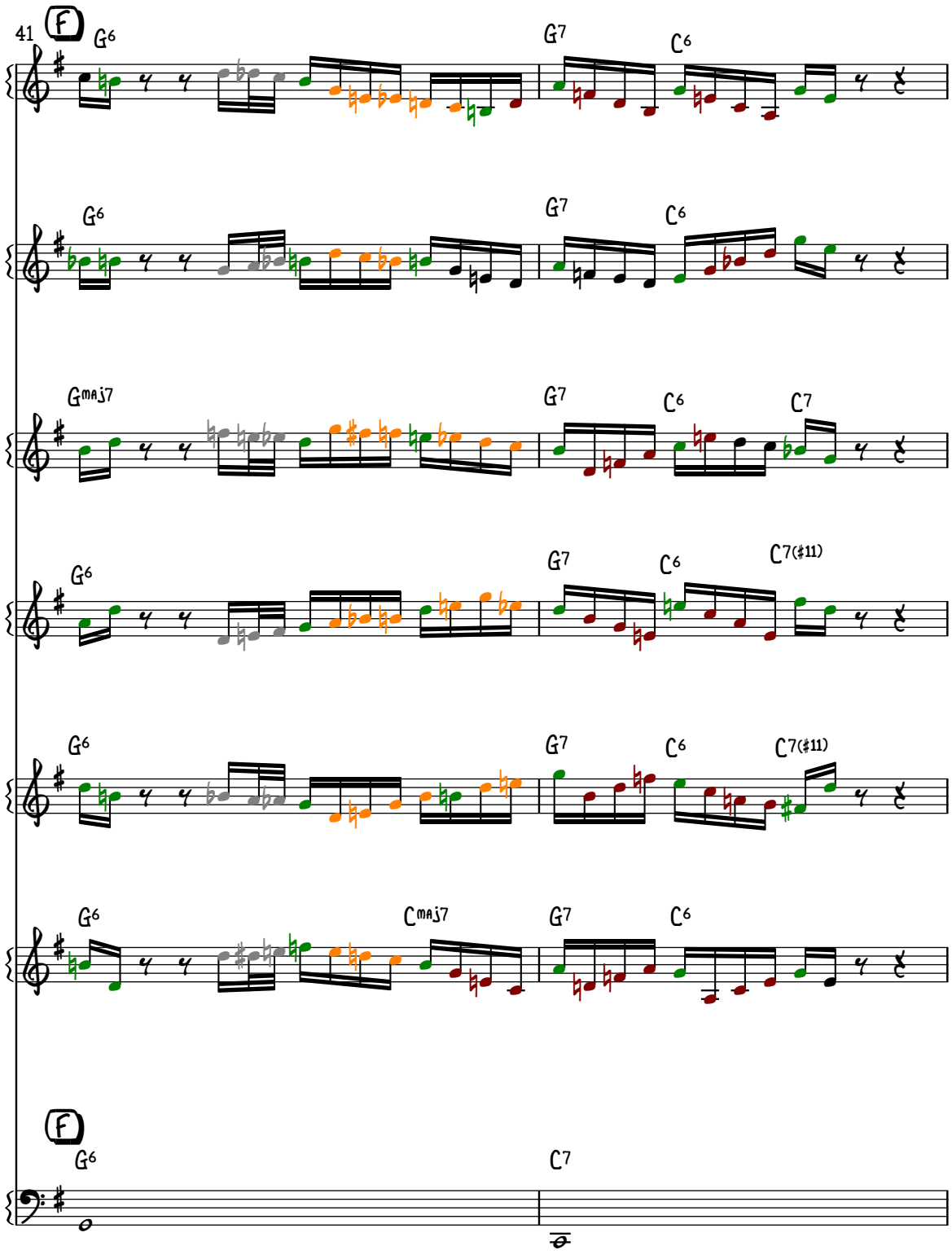
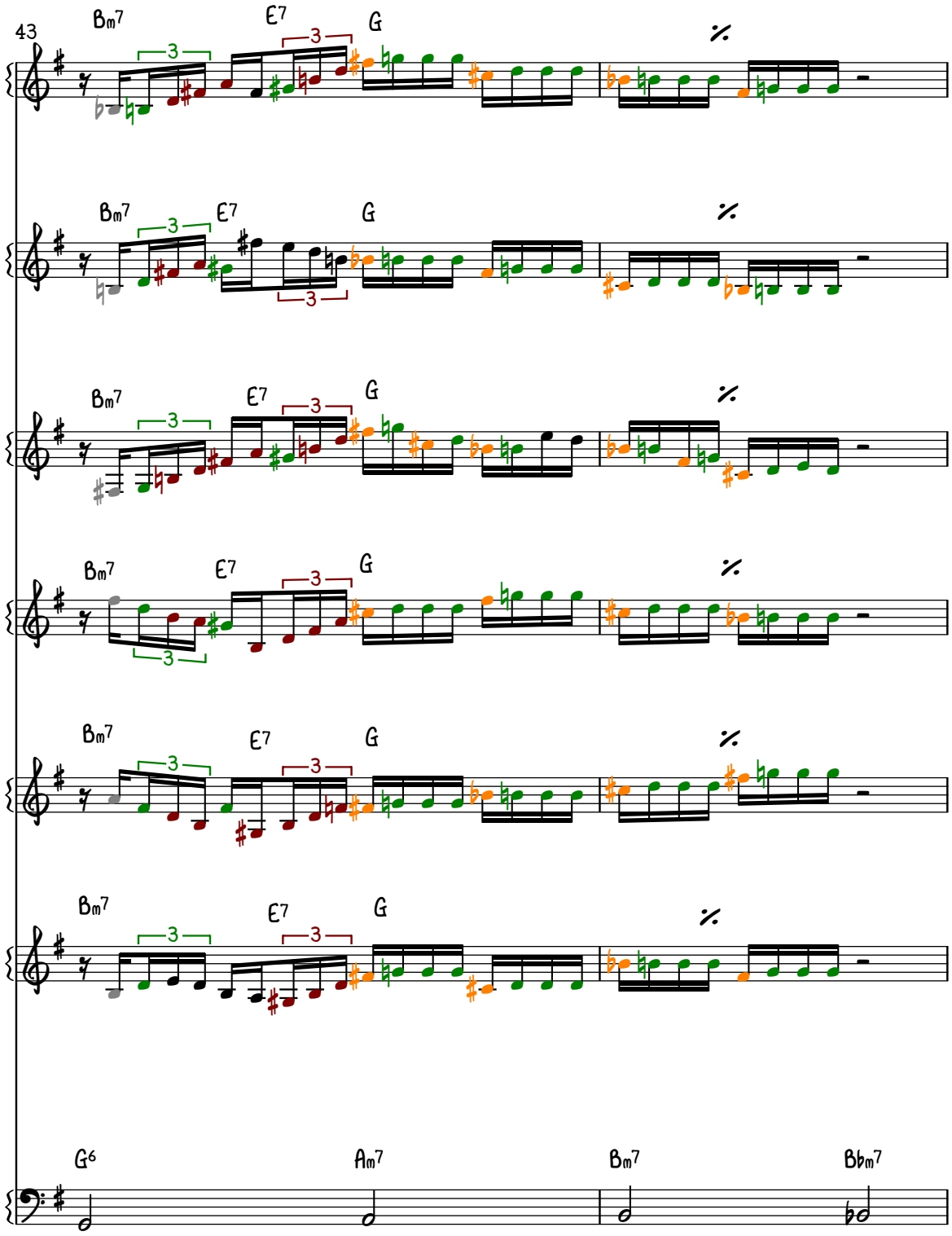

41
F
G6
G7
C6
G6
G7
C6
Gmaj7
G7
C6
C7
G6
G7
C6
C7(♯11)
G6
G7
C6
C7(♯11)
G6
Cmaj7
G7
C6
F
G6
C7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G
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Bm7
E7
G
G6
Am7
Bm7
Bbm7


45
Am7
D7
Am7
D7
3
Am7
D7
Am7
D7
3
D7
Am7
D7
Am7
D7
Am7
D7
Am7
D7(♭13)
D7
3
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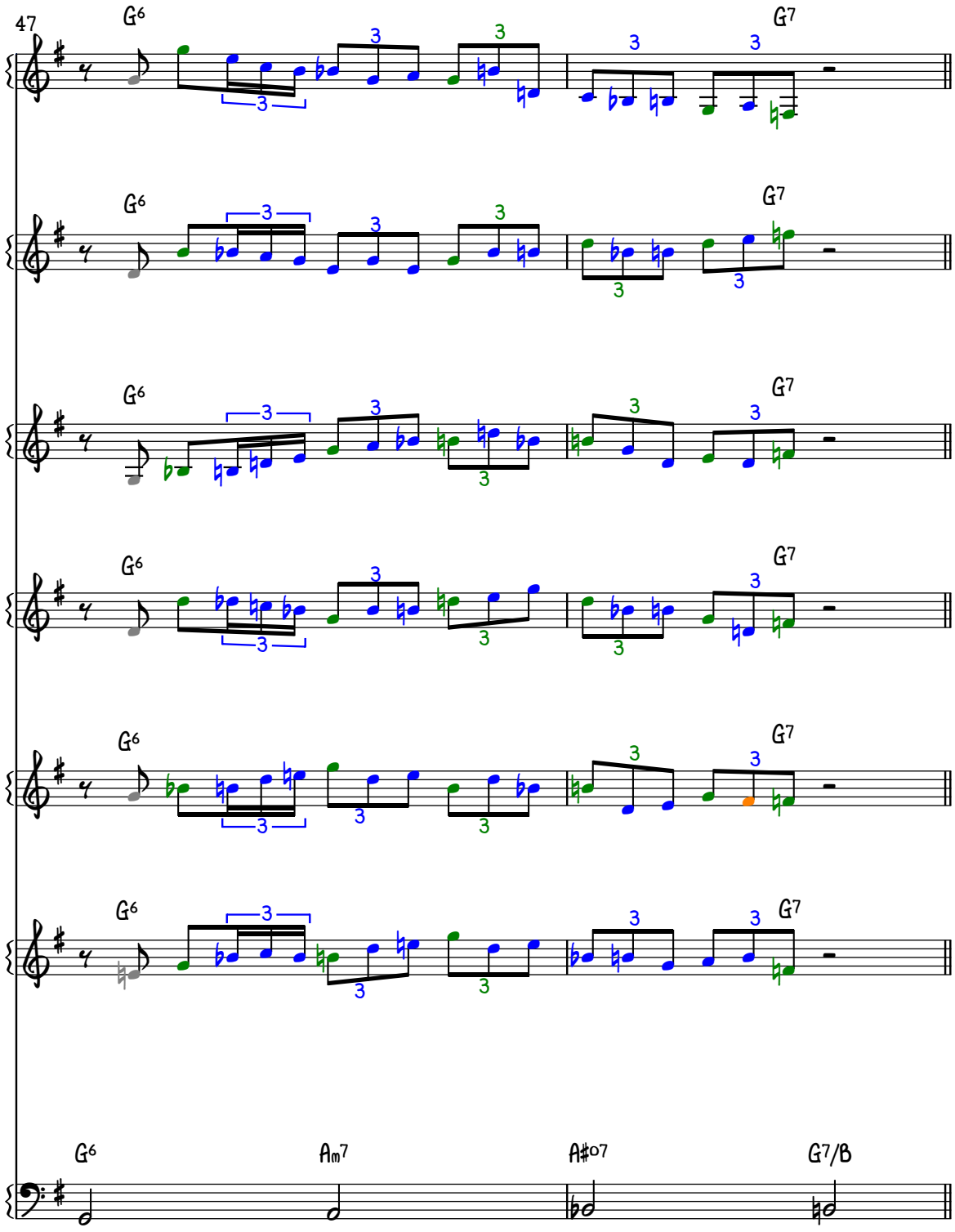
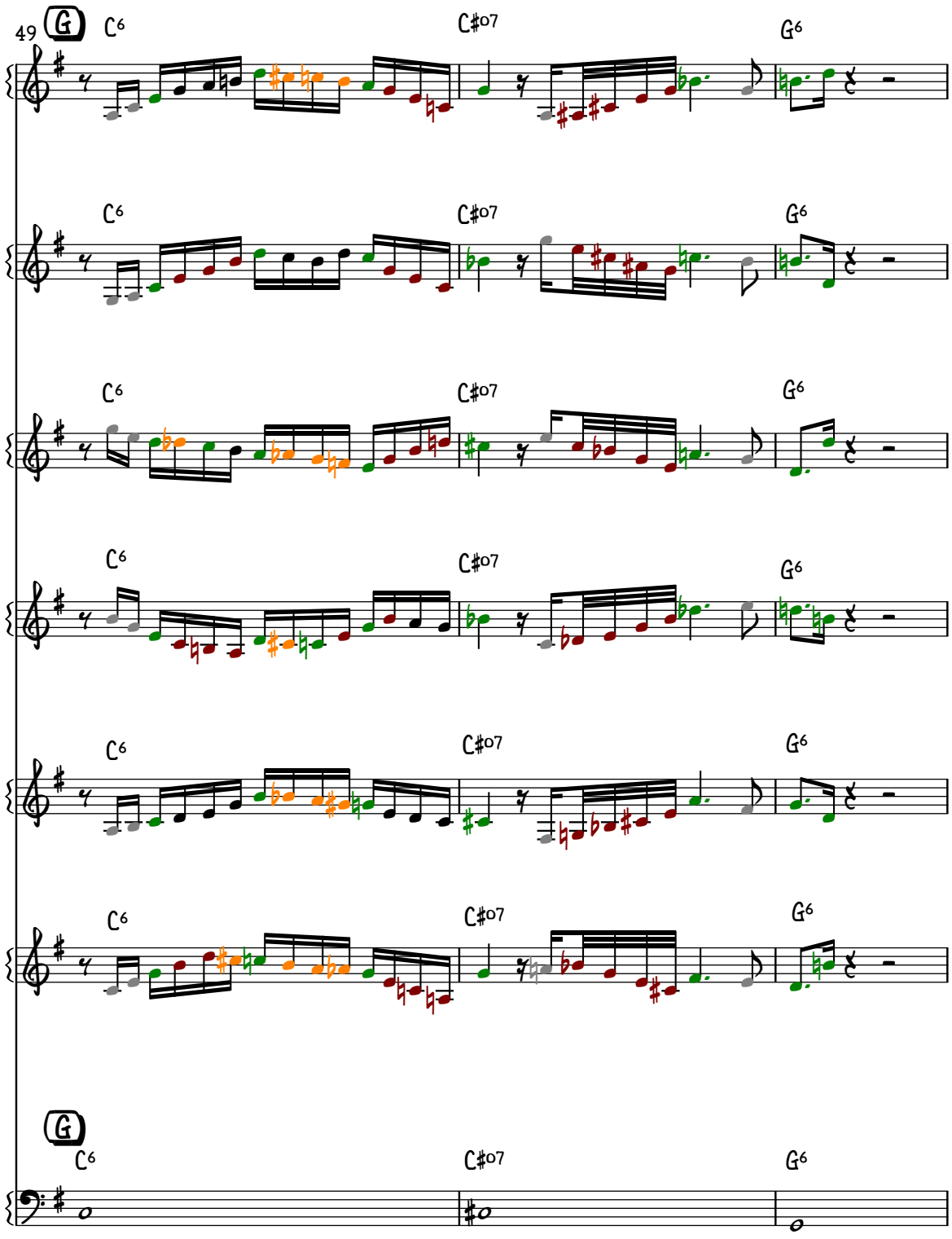
D7
Am7
Cm6
D7
Am7
D7
3
Am7
Cm7
D7
Am7
D7


47
G6
G7
G6
G7
G6
G7
G6
G7
G6
G7
G6
G7
G6
Am7
A#o7
G7/B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G
C6
C♯o7
G6
C6
C♯o7
G6
C6
C♯o7
G6
C6
C♯o7
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C♯o7
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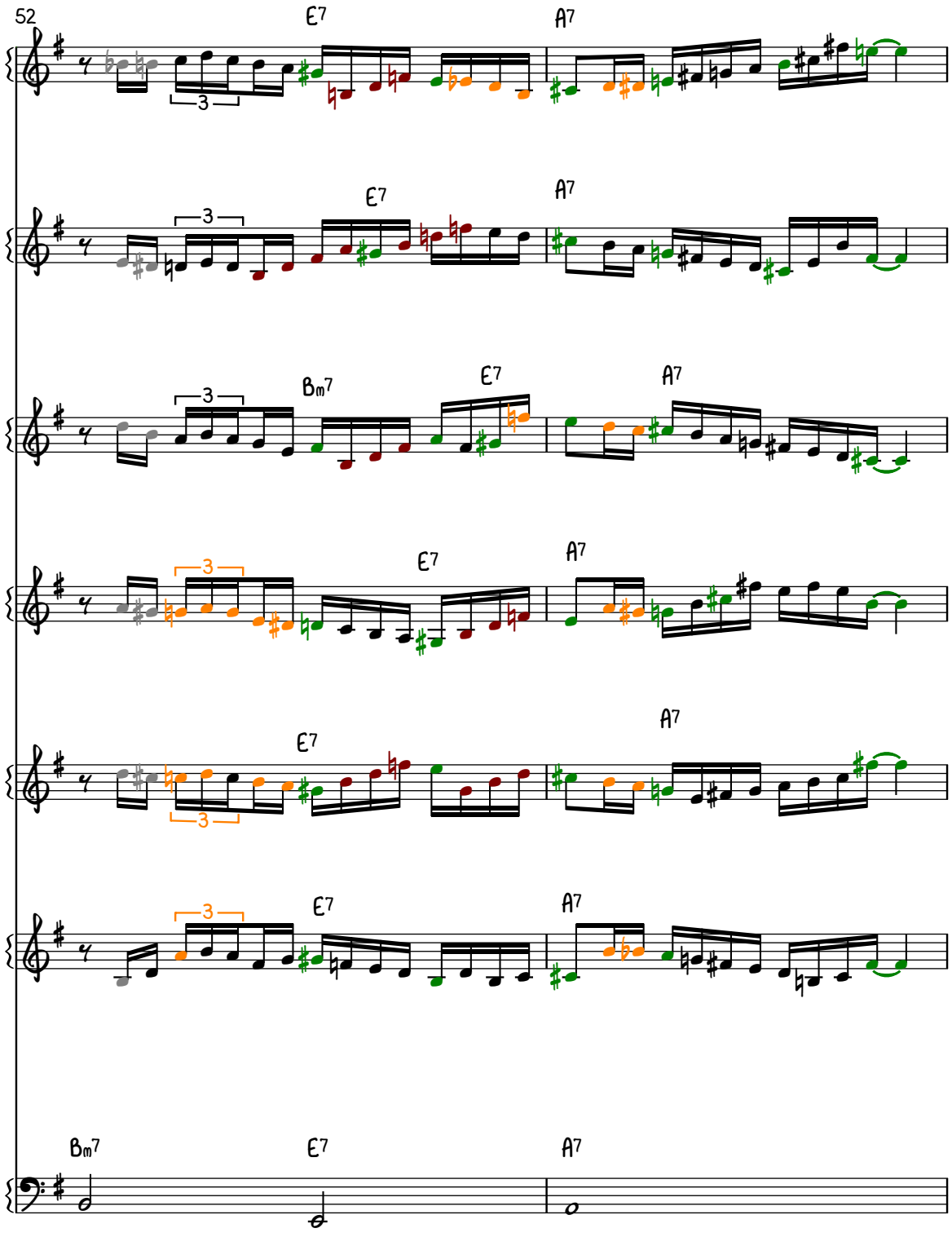
C6
C♯o7
G6
G
C6
C♯o7
G6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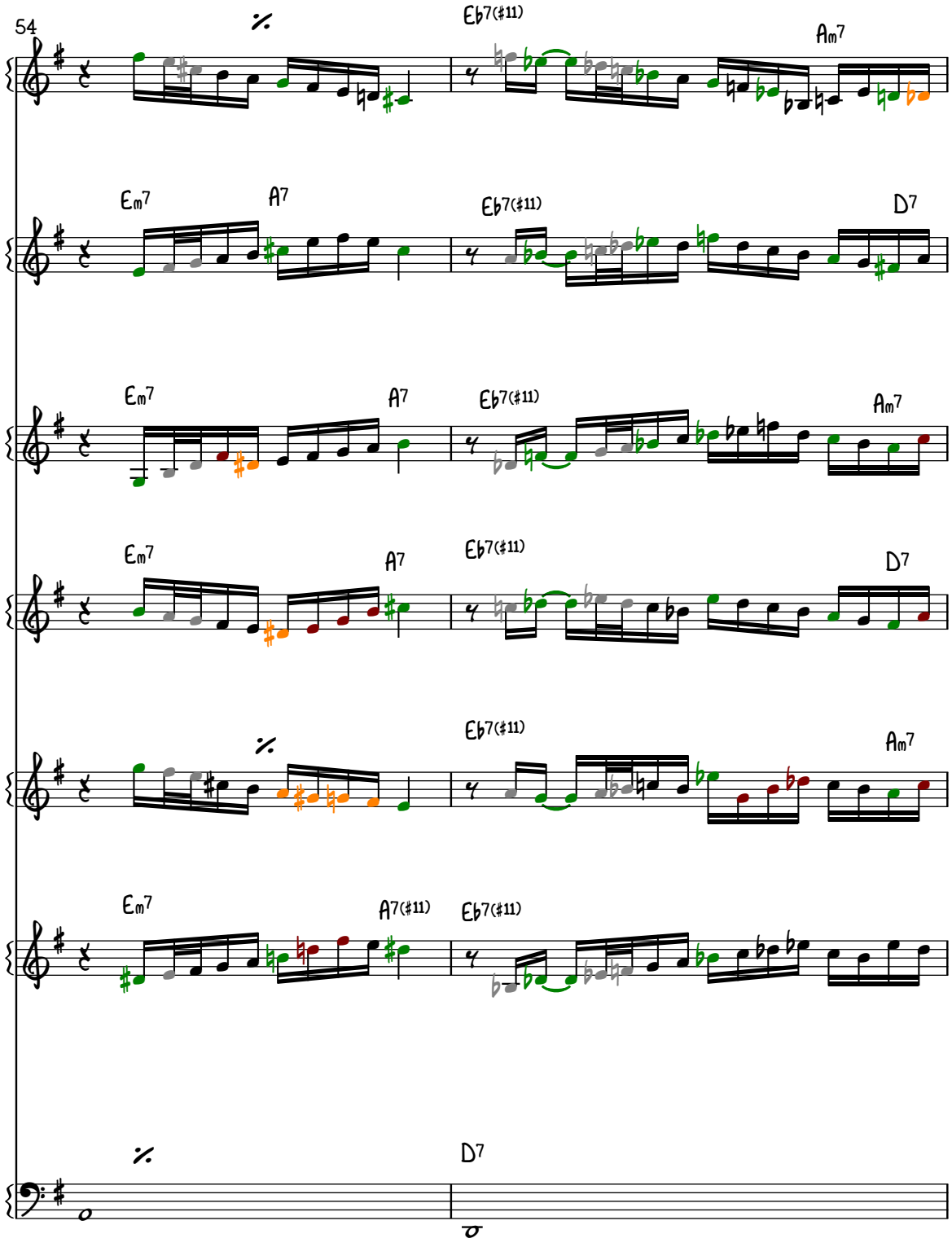
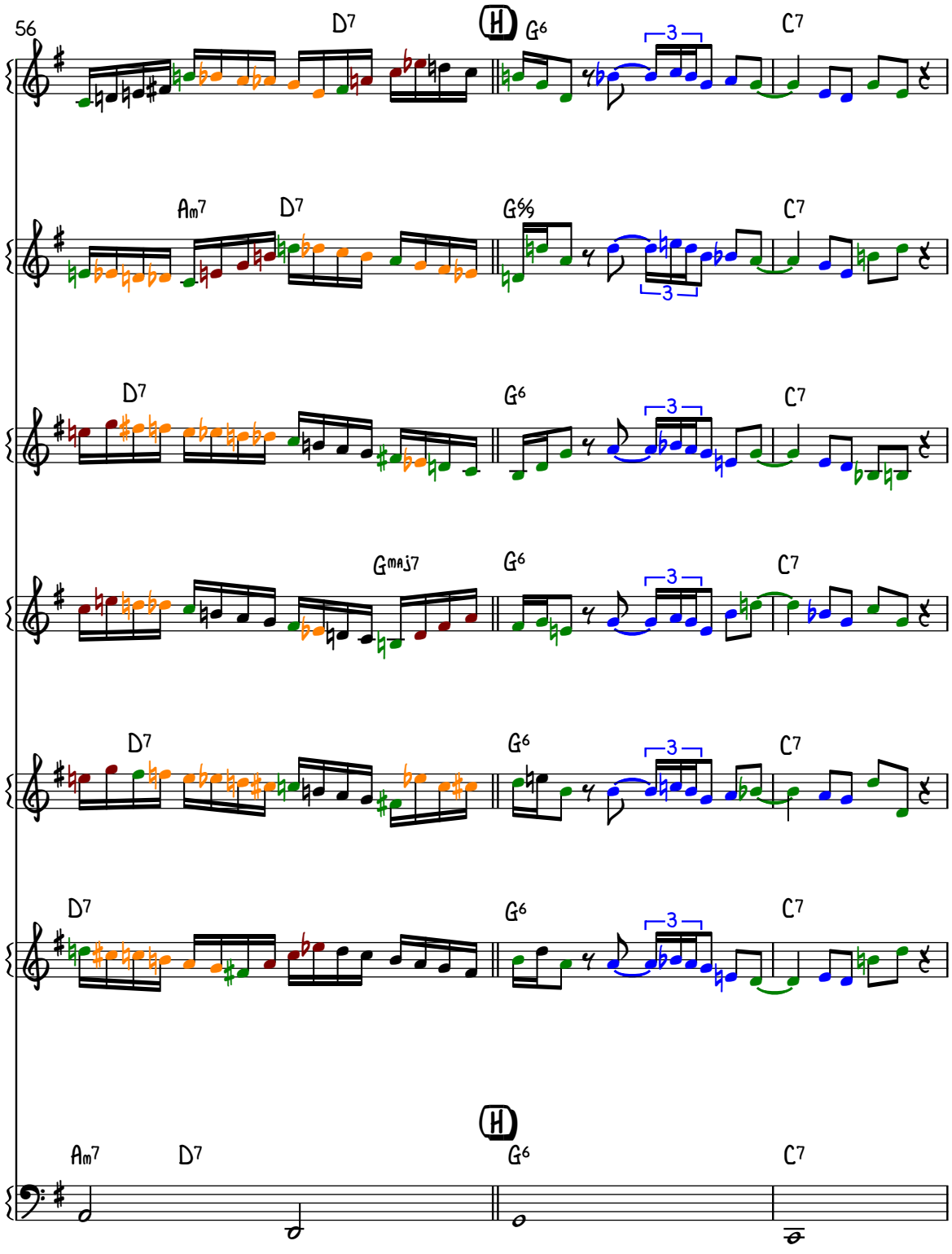
E7
A7
E7
A7
Bm7
E7
A7
E7
A7
E7
A7
Bm7
E7
A7


54
Eb7(♯11)
Am7
Em7
A7
Eb7(♯11)
D7
Em7
A7
Eb7(♯11)
Am7
Em7
A7
Eb7(♯11)
D7
Eb7(♯11)
Am7
Em7
A7(♯11)
Eb7(♯11)
D7


56
D7
H
G6
3
C7
Am7
D7
G6
3
C7
D7
G6
3
C7
Gmaj7
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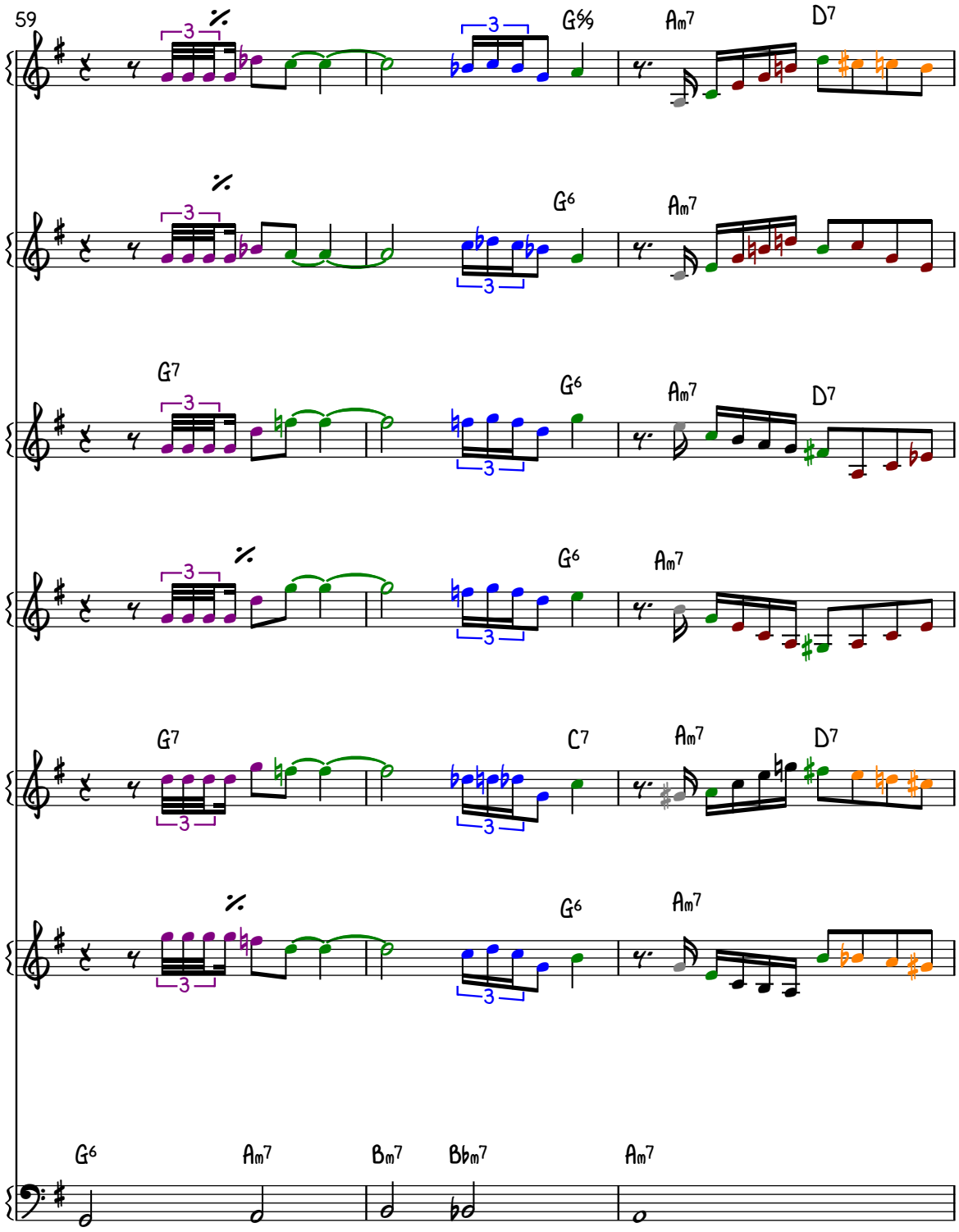
G6
3
C7
H
Am7
D7
G6
C7


59
G%
Am7
D7
G6
Am7
G7
G6
Am7
D7
G6
Am7
G7
C7
Am7
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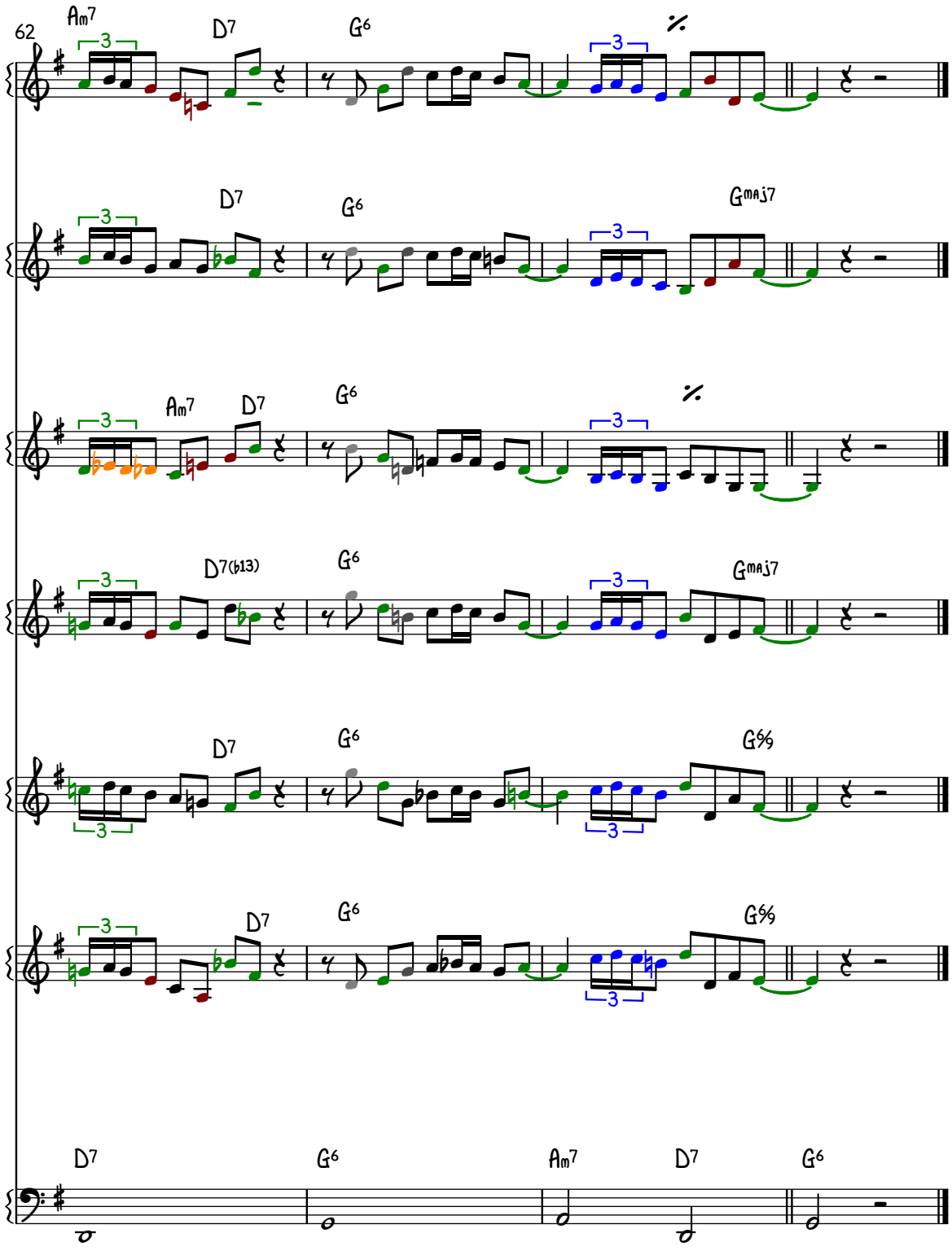
G6
Am7
G6
Am7
Bm7
Bbm7
Am7


62
Am7
D7
G6
%
D7
G6
Gmaj7
Am7
D7
G6
%
D7(b13)
G6
Gmaj7
D7
G6
G%
D7
G6
G%
D7
G6
Am7
D7
G6

V: III Conclusions

Having completed the *melodic transplant* experiment I have made some key observations:

- The 'big picture' remains clear- after having recorded and listened to each of the five re-compositions I argue that they could be 'passed off' as being previously undiscovered Charlie Parker solos.
- The flow or 'conversational logic' of the melodic ideas is retained within each of the re-compositions. The harmonic narrative is tangible.
- The harmonic narrative seems to possess the same or at very least, a very similar 'meaning' despite the new and significantly altered melodic ideas.
- The melodic ideas within this solo are highly flexible- the malleability of Parker's melodic ideas suggests that there is infinite possibility for the creation of new ideas within this vernacular style.
- The import of formulaic material may be secondary to *why* a solo of Charlie Parker's sounds the way it does. If the actual melodic content of Parker's melodic ideas was essential or even imperative, then the experiment would have failed.
- The role of formula can now be seen in three distinct ways: 1) formula is necessary to execute a harmonic narrative in a spontaneously improvised form; 2) the content of the formulaic (melodic) ideas is of lesser import than the

harmony and rhythm; 3) formula is a means for an improviser to stumble onto new ideas. This latter observation (which was discussed in chapter I) casts the role of formula as a means to find new melodic material. To reiterate, formula is a means of discovering and subsequently forging new paths to unknown destinations which are, to a large extent, stumbled upon.

- We may know some of Parker's harmonic concept - if the harmonic assumptions regarding the subject and the means were incorrect then the re-compositions would have been fraught with error.
- The rhythm, phrasing and harmony may actually be paramount. If all the notes/pitches can all be changed then the harmonic context and the rhythm and phrasing may be responsible for much of the perceived 'meaning' within the narrative. This suggests that there may be a hierarchy within Parker's music and/or the bebop vernacular. In order of importance they are rhythm, harmony and last and arguably least, melody.

Despite the realization that the rhythm and phrasing may actually account for a greater part of Parker's musical vernacular the findings within this experiment are useful. The *harmonic narrative model* was an effective tool in conceptually organizing some of Parker's musical gestures and the harmonic attributes within this solo. The harmonic narrative is heavily reliant on the rhythm and phrasing. These musical elements may be less flexible than the melodic

pitches themselves. My current research is centred around the study and explication of the rhythm and phrasing as they appear in Charlie Parker's musical vernacular.

Chapter VI: Future Pedagogy

The *harmonic narrative model* could be used as an educational tool: an improvisatory model that could potentially reveal a student's harmonic proficiency and their understanding of how harmonic functions are illustrated, melodically, within a given musical vernacular. The skills that are required to rewrite a solo using the same 'means' and 'subjects' found within the improvisation whilst retaining the rhythm, phrasing and harmonic context may be pedagogically useful.

The understanding and/or comprehension of the nuances of harmonic functions within jazz can often be 'event specific'. It is imperative to flesh out the details within these harmonic events in order to understand the propensity of an improviser's melodic concepts: such studies will vary on a case by case basis. At this stage in harmonic theory many of the core harmonic tenets may be considered universal. However, the differences or unique expression of these harmonic tenets often lie in individuals' choices, preferences or even their limitations of knowledge. It is possible that even the greatest jazz improvisers, Parker being no exception, possessed varying degrees of harmonic understanding: not all of which may have been 'correct'. The melodic expression of harmony within the jazz vernacular possesses a degree of specificity whether one addresses the music of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane or Bud Powell. Therefore, a model that helps a student engage in identifying the various components that harmonically constitute an individual's melodic vernacular could be quite useful.

If we look at the *harmonic narrative model* as a kind of 'paint by numbers method', we find some distinct similarities. The framework is fixed but the outward appearance is left somewhat undetermined. The successful colouration is determined by the a priori knowledge of what it 'should' look like e.g. if it is a tree and the season is summer it will most likely be some variety of the colour green. This a priori knowledge reveals some fundamental levels of understanding. Within the improvisational vernacular of the bebop style the issues become far more complex.

Application of the *harmonic narrative model* could help to reveal a student's harmonic knowledge and understanding of the harmonic complexities and nuances within a player's vernacular. This knowledge and understanding can now be measured in a practical way and not just through theoretical testing. The student's applied skill set can now be quantifiably assessed and measured.

There will always be a degree of inherent subjectivity within the criteria that impose a set of parameters intended to measure the creative process. However, if a student were to embark on a similar experiment, the evaluation of a student's knowledge might consist of the following elements:

- Do they understand the harmonic context?
- Can they identify where/when the improviser is targeting the subjects?
- Are the devices (means) used to expound on the subjects clear and understood?
- Do the melodic ideas sound as if they came from the original author (improviser)

I would deem that the acquisition and/or possession of such knowledge is highly valuable and necessary for any aspiring improviser. Within the institutional environment where jazz is now taught (and primarily exists), the tools available for an evaluator to quantifiably assess the depth of an individual's practical understanding of harmony and the musical vernacular they are studying are limited.

An understanding of harmonic theory is most effectively displayed through musical example and/or application. Musical understanding is best revealed not through theoretical jargon but through musical illustration. The theoretical and applied skill that is required in order to retain the musical narrative while replacing the pitches of any given improvisation in the jazz vernacular requires three key elements: 1) an understanding of what the vernacular should sound like; 2) knowledge of what is harmonically correct; 3) an understanding of the improviser's preferences or musical habits.

A course of study could be structured using the following seminal jazz icons as the basis for another series of *melodic transplant experiments*. This could be conducted in a chronological sequence which also reflects one commonly cited stream of jazz evolution:

- Louis Armstrong
- Lester Young
- Charlie Parker
- John Coltrane

If the student is able to consistently re-compose any given solo from each of these seminal figures using the *harmonic narrative model*, then there is both a measured understanding of the jazz vernacular being used, an understanding of the harmony and an improviser's melodic obligation to it. Such an exercise could also aid in addressing the specific areas of weakness within a student's musical comprehension.

An individual's knowledge and understanding of harmony are fraught with a great deal of subjectivity: on many occasions there is more than one explanation for a musical problem. A way to combat this subjectivity (allowing incorrect ideas to proliferate based on random intellectual criteria) may be through *melodic transplant experiments* similar to the one conducted for this paper.

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