CHICK COREA

Chick Corea Keyboard Workshop

Methods of Composition, Improvisation, and Practice

A booklet to accompany the video

Written by CHICK COREA

With musical transcriptions by Bob Quaranta
Additional text and analyses by John Novello, author of "The Contemporary Keyboardist."

Edited by Glenn Mangel and Emily A. Frankewicz
Photos by Janet VanHam

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PREFACE

What follows is study material for use in conjunction with "Keyboard Workshop," a video which Chick made for DCI. It is primarily written by Chick, with some harmonic analyses by John Novello which should be extremely helpful to the advanced player. The video and booklet have much information which will be understood by musicians at every level of experience. If there are aspects that are beyond your grasp at this point, you are sure to understand more as you develop as a player.

A suggestion for finding your place on the tape when you wish to go back to a particular section: set your VCR counter to zero when you begin viewing the video. As you get to each section, make a note in the booklet as to the corresponding number on the counter. Then when you want to review a particular spot, finding it will be easy.

In the video, Chick is shown composing and arranging a song entitled "Long Fall" (part of which is reprinted in this booklet, in Chick's own handwriting). It may be of interest to note that he did not prepare this tune in advance of the taping—what is seen on the video is Chick's actual writing process.

—The Producers.

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PHILOSOPHY OF STUDY

Gradient: a gradual approach to something, taken step by step, level by level, each step or level being, of itself, easily surmountable—so that finally, quite complicated and difficult activities can be achieved with relative ease.

Win: intending to do something and doing it, or intending *not* to do something and *not* doing it.

Learning to give oneself "wins" by using and taking on the correct gradient is important. If the gradient is too steep, losses and failure result; if too easy, boredom and no advancement. So—

1) DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO DO.
2) ACHIEVE IT, by selecting and using the correct gradient—the one that will produce the win and feeling of success.

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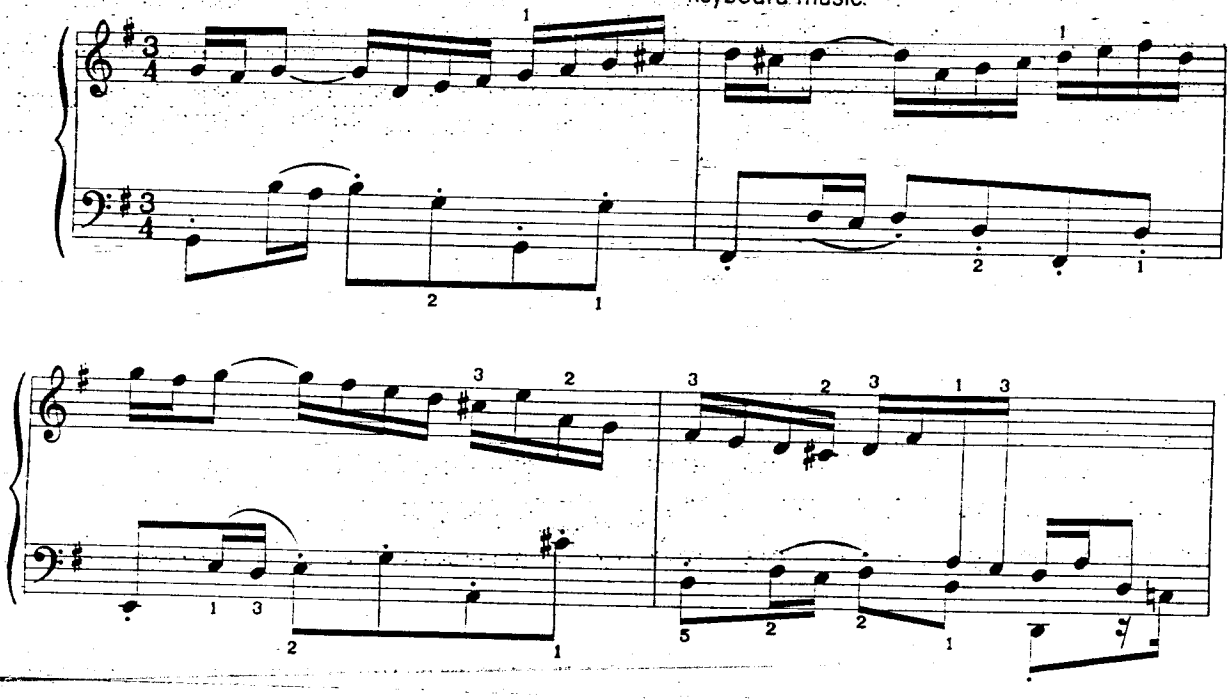
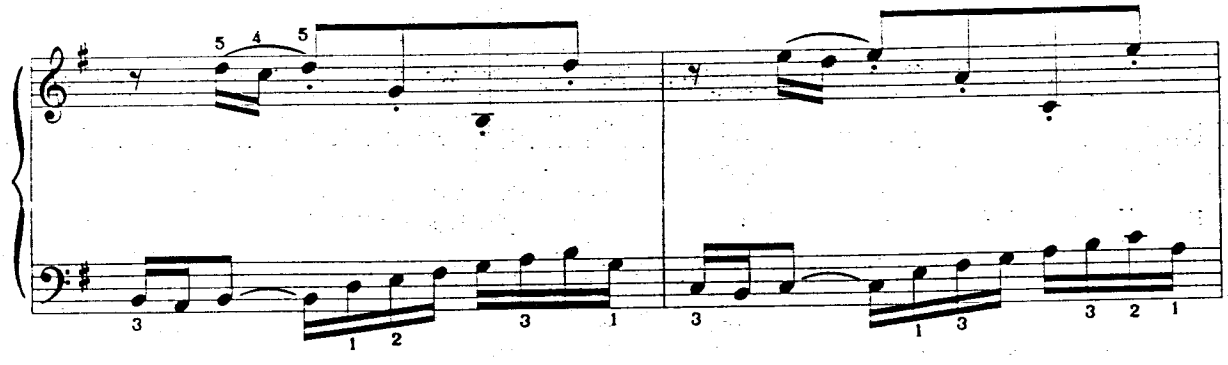
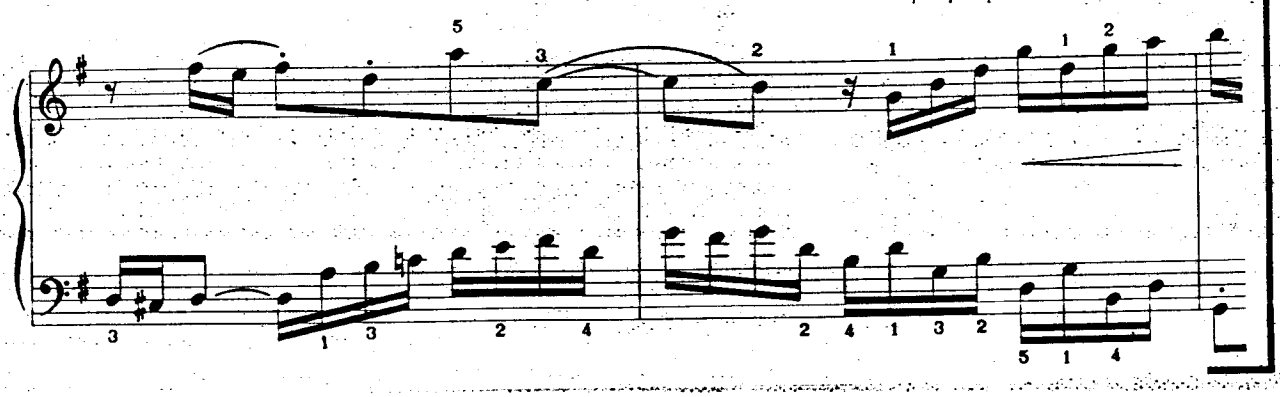
J.S. Bach—Goldberg Variation #1

Bach has been a general musical inspiration in many ways—the clarity of his interweaving melodies, his ability to compose like an improviser, the abundance of his work and the ease with which he composed. Bach produced a *lot* of great music, especially keyboard music.



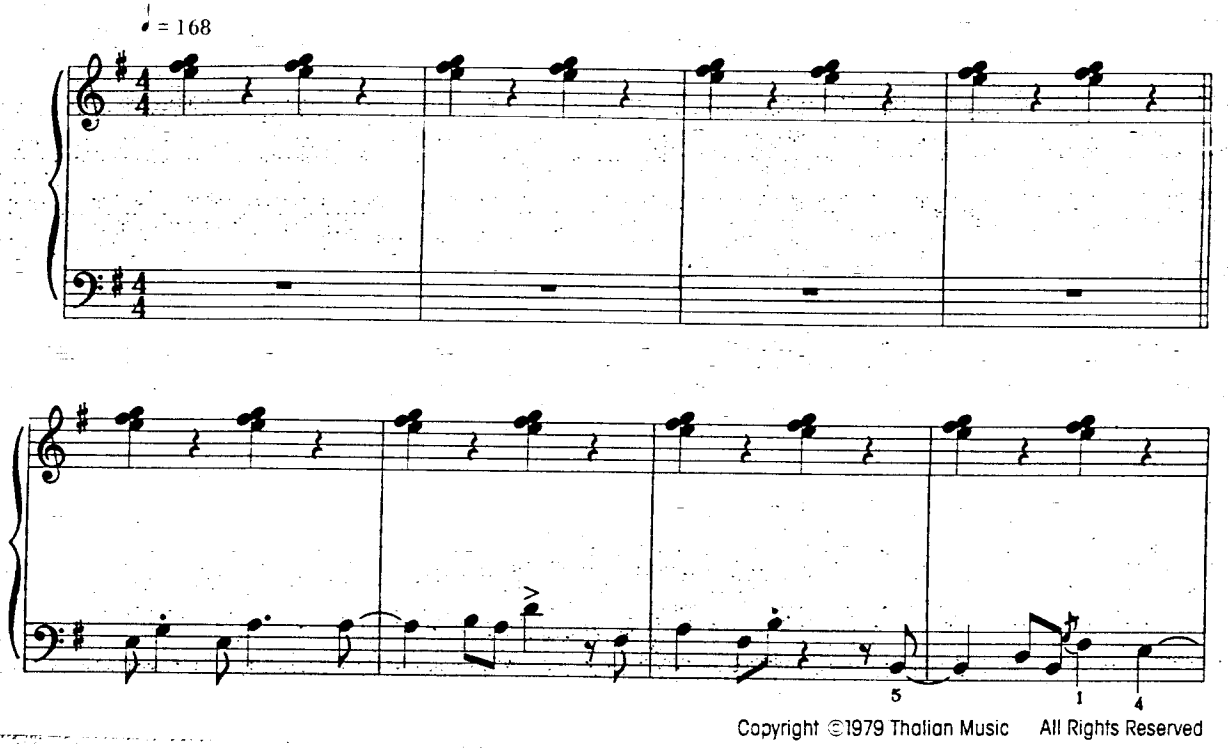


Chick plays up to here on video.



CHILDREN'S SONG #16

Chick Corea



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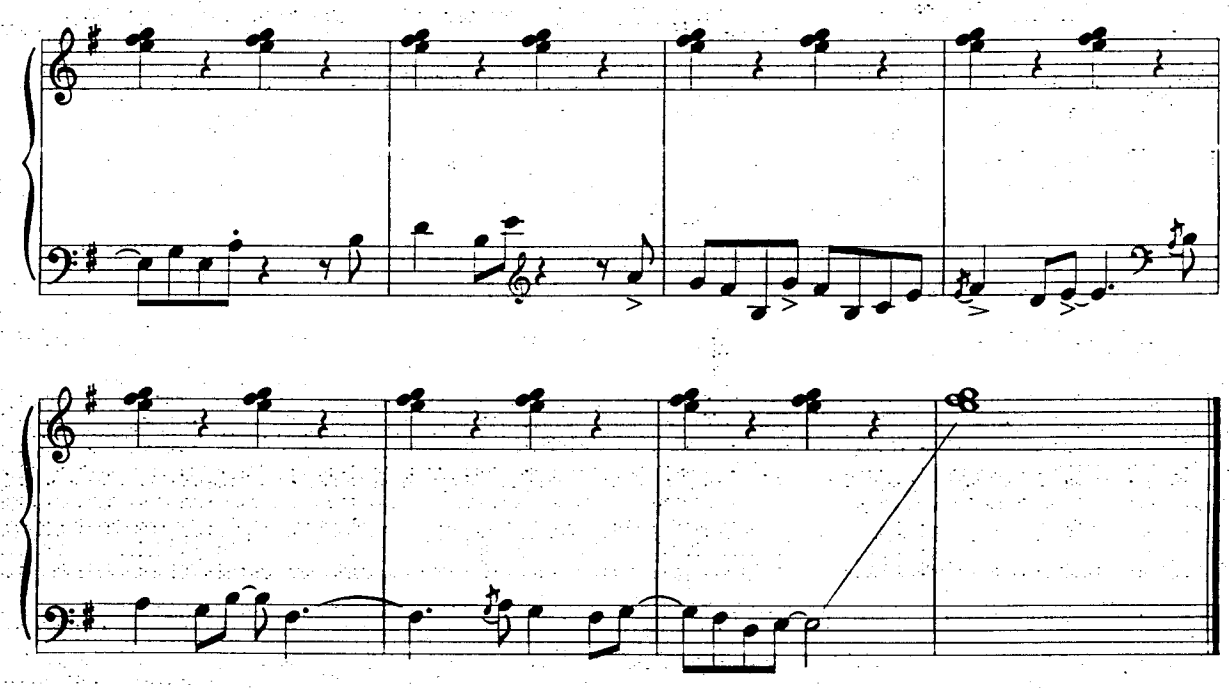
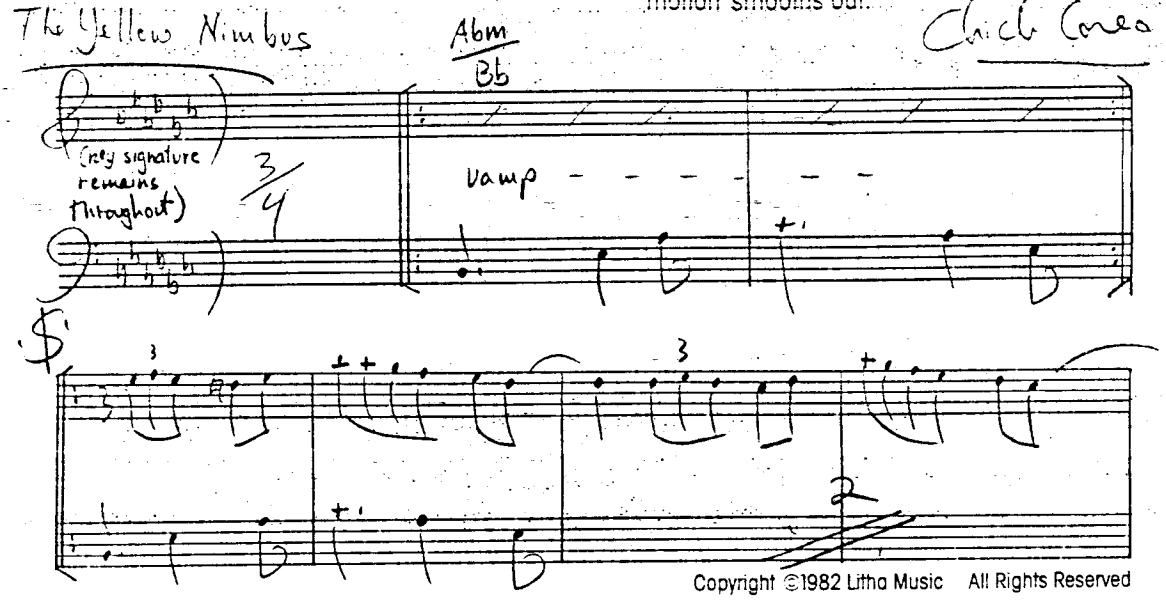


FLOW Art and music can communicate something with beauty and grace. As physical manifestations, the things that add up to what many agree to be "beautiful" are:
—Control
—Intention demonstrated and done with ease
—Uninterrupted motion with intention

Imagine the flow of motion you want to create, be it body movement or the playing of a musical phrase. Start the flow of motion, slowly at first, and notice all the "glitches"—just notice them—don't do anything about them.

Just keep doing these actions until the intended motion smooths out.



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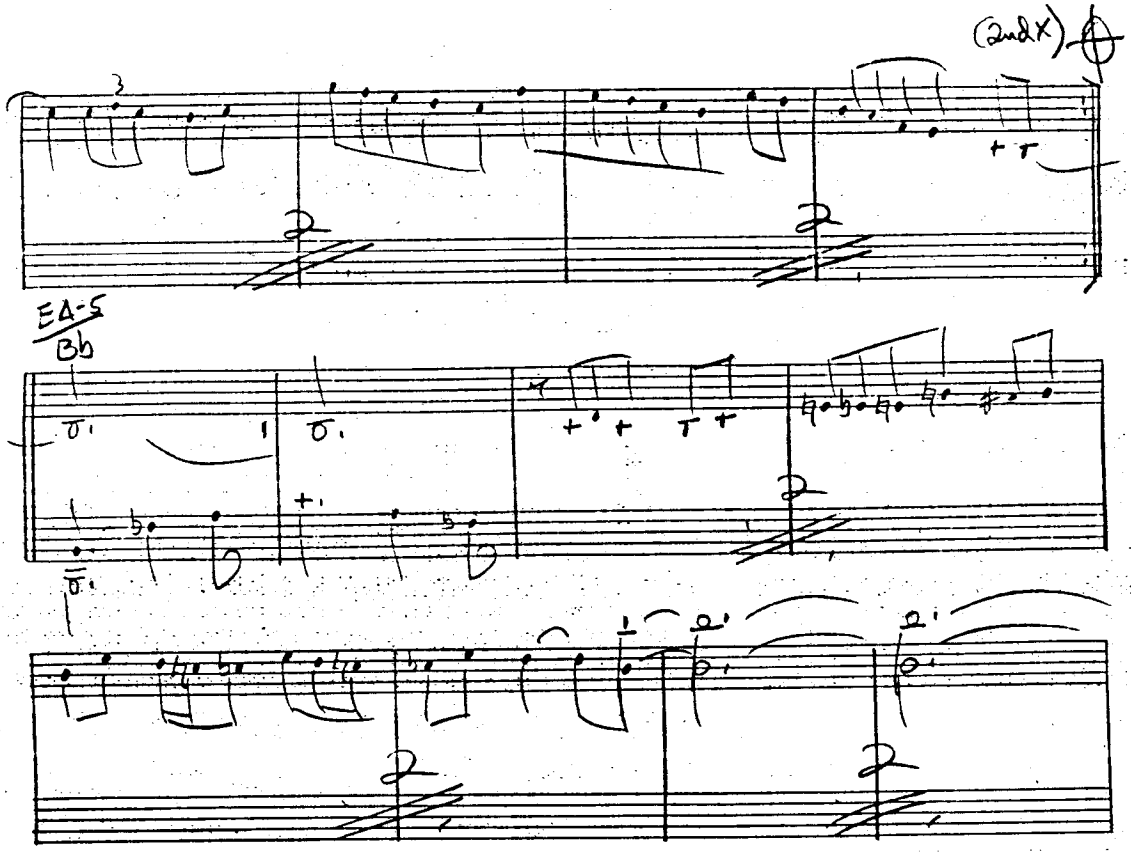
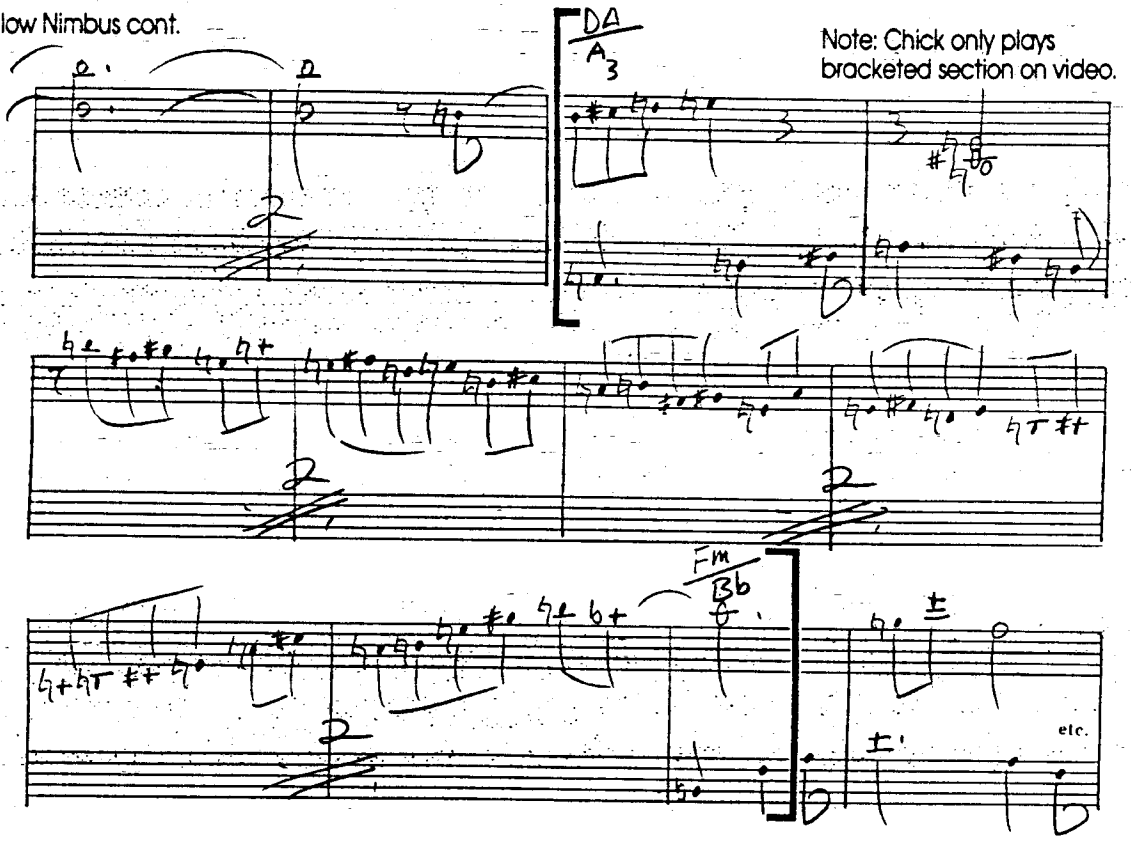


The Yellow Nimbus cont.

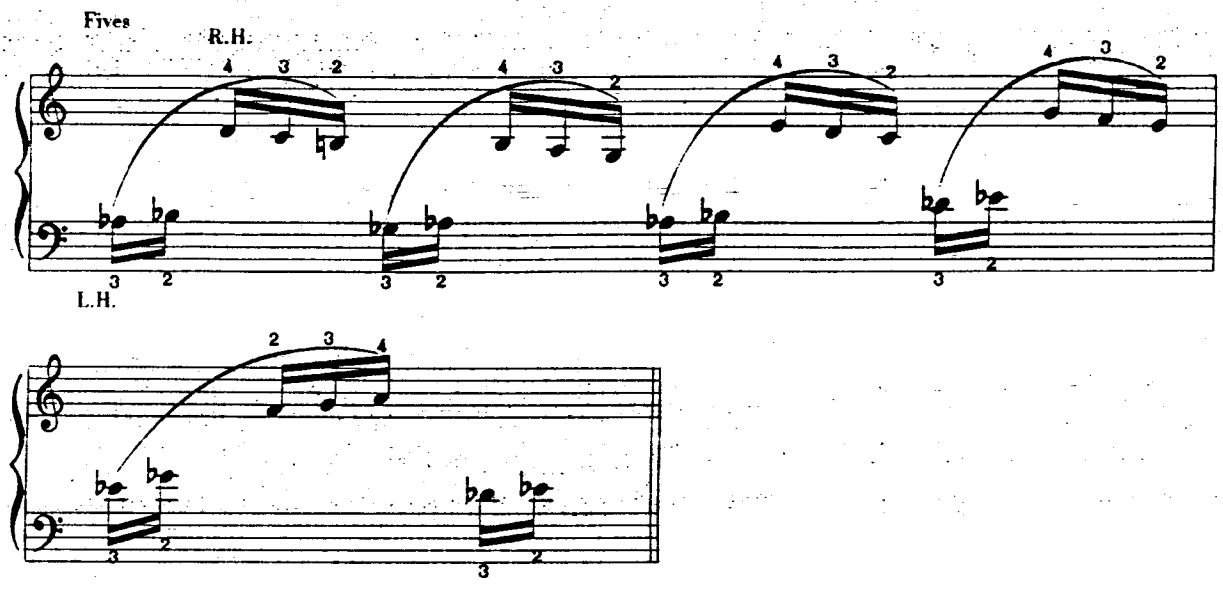


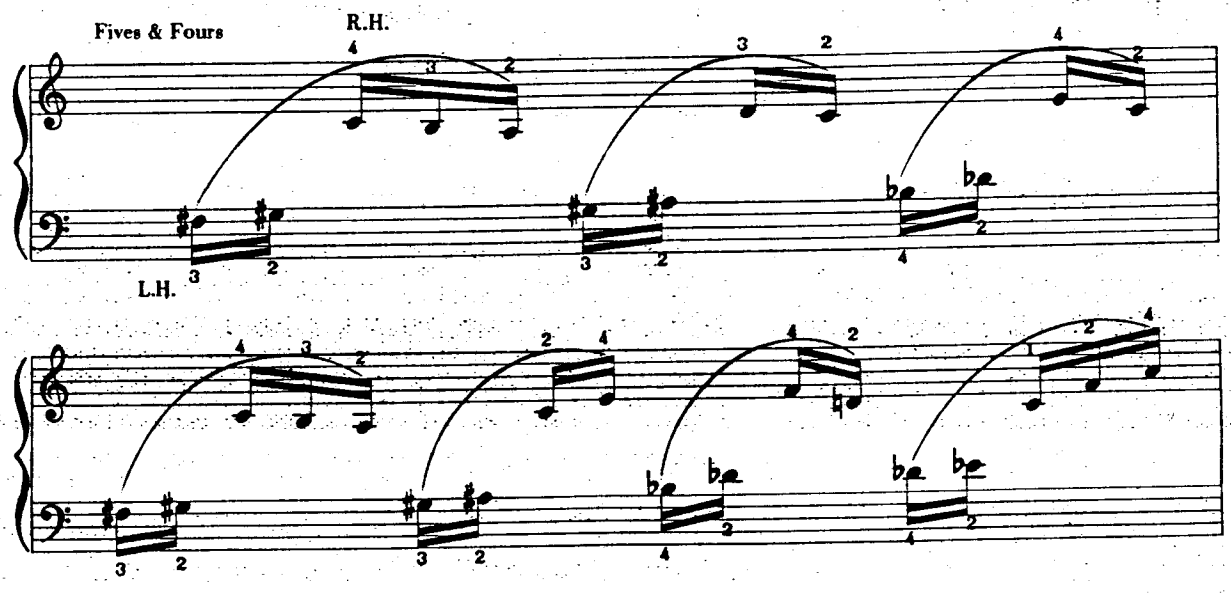
PRACTICE

I find that if I'm practicing a piece and I'm having difficulty in a particular part and the difficulty keeps happening, very often it will be that there's a part just prior to that where I never got a fingering together, or some little glitch happens—You know, you go along and there's this little glitch, and then five seconds later you're having a problem. Well, it's not that section that you have to worry about—it's the little glitch earlier that threw your attention off. So the flow's gone and you start to stumble over *here*. So you have to find out where those points are.

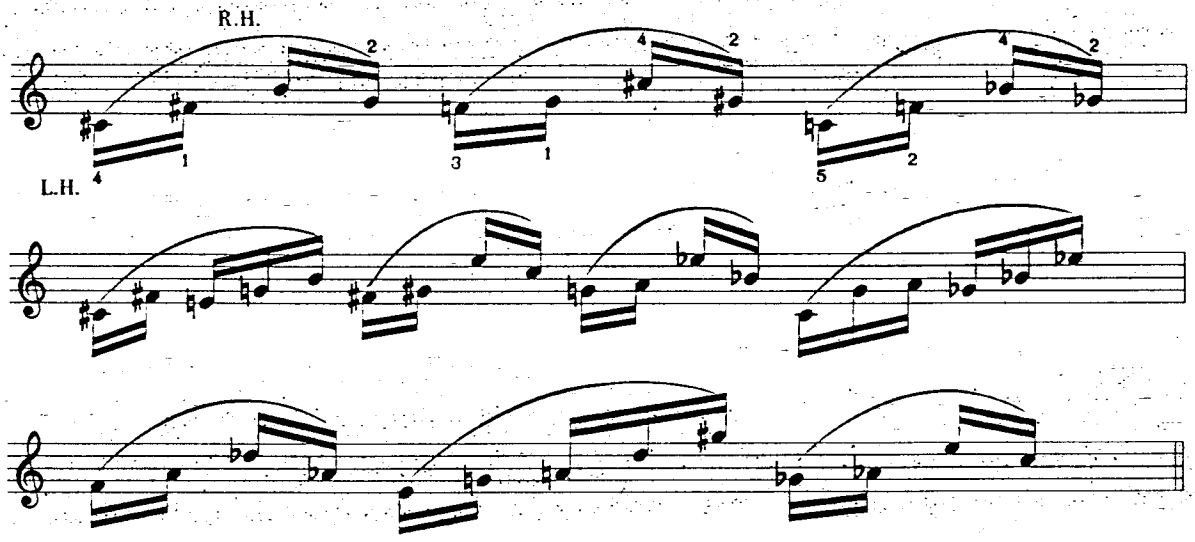
TEN DRUMMERS

This technique is a matter of considering the ten fingers of the hands to be individual musicians, and the 88 keys of the piano to be 88 drums.





Ten Drummers cont.



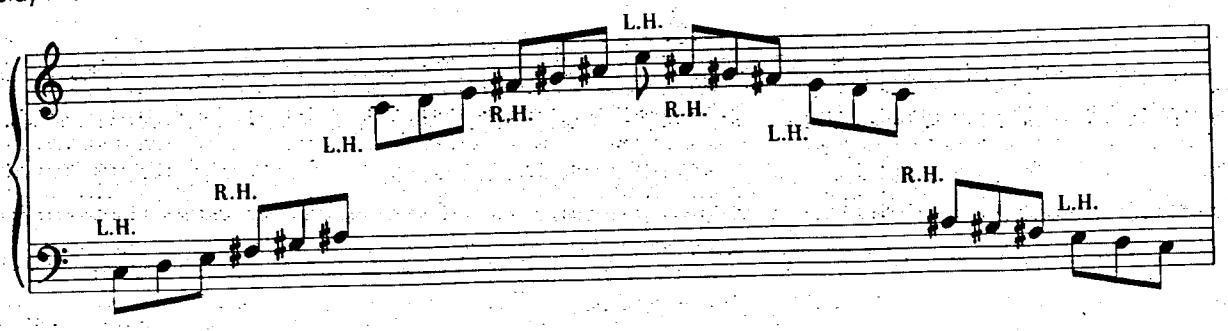
TEN DRUMMERS: TWO-HANDED SCALE DRILLS

by John Novello

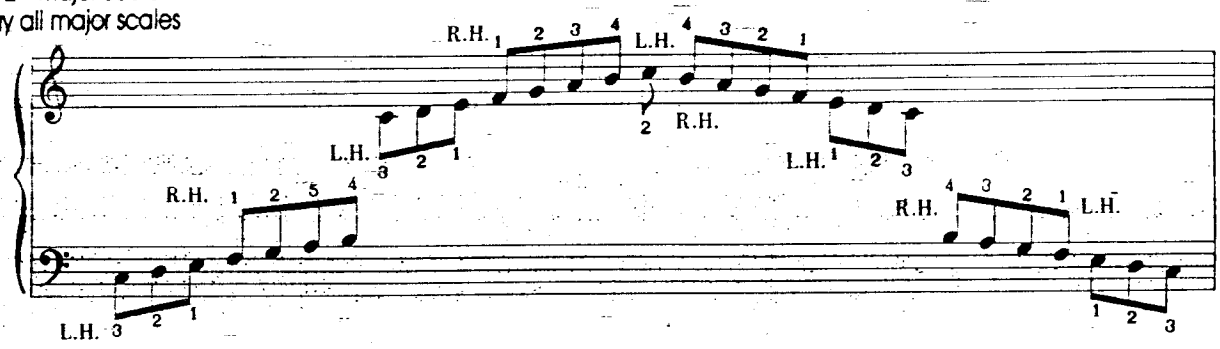
Although this technique appears quite easy as demonstrated, it takes a lot of coordination to do well. In order for the scale to sound as one phrase played with one hand, there can be no audible "glitches" as the scale changes hands. It is therefore very helpful to do some preparatory drills, which can be divided up into two areas for practicing purposes:

1) *Scales and Arpeggios,* to acquire good linear movement. Although there are many possibilities, here are three that will help get you started. They should of course be done four octaves in all twelve keys!

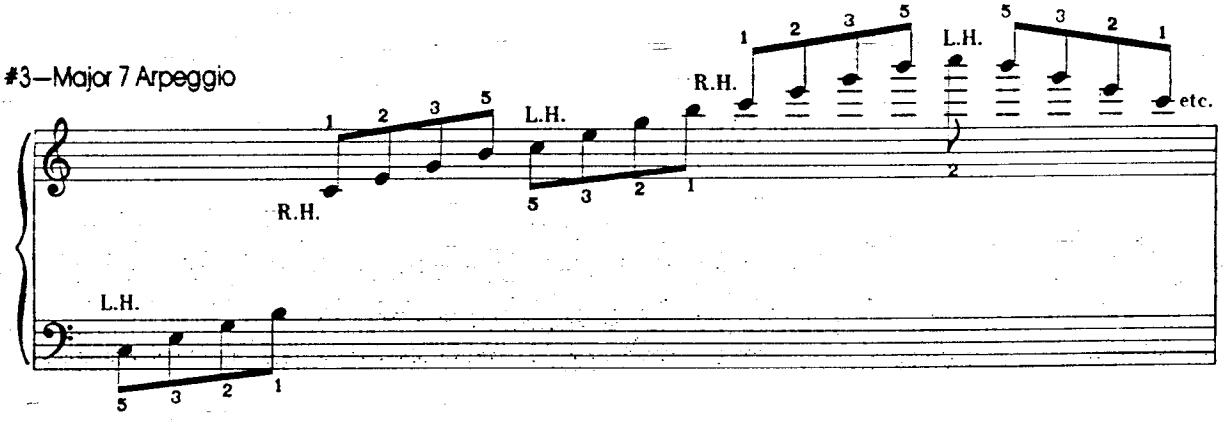
Drill #1—Whole Tone Scale
—play two octaves first, then extend to four octaves



Drill #2—Major Scale
—play all major scales

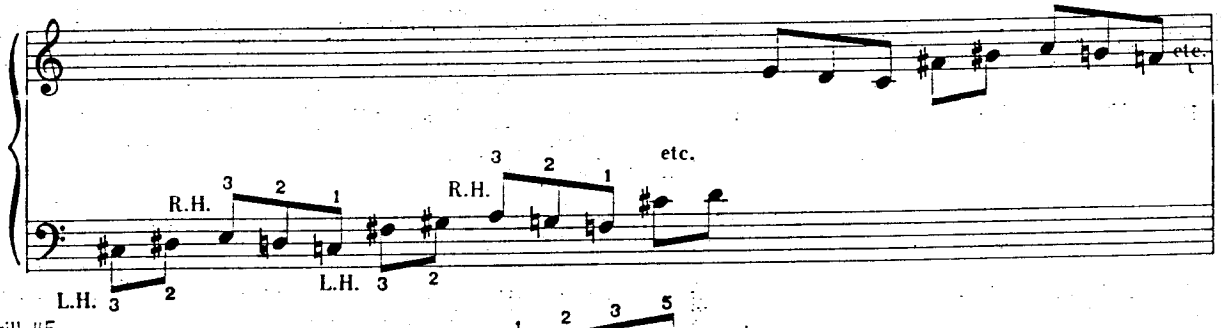


Drill #3—Major 7 Arpeggio

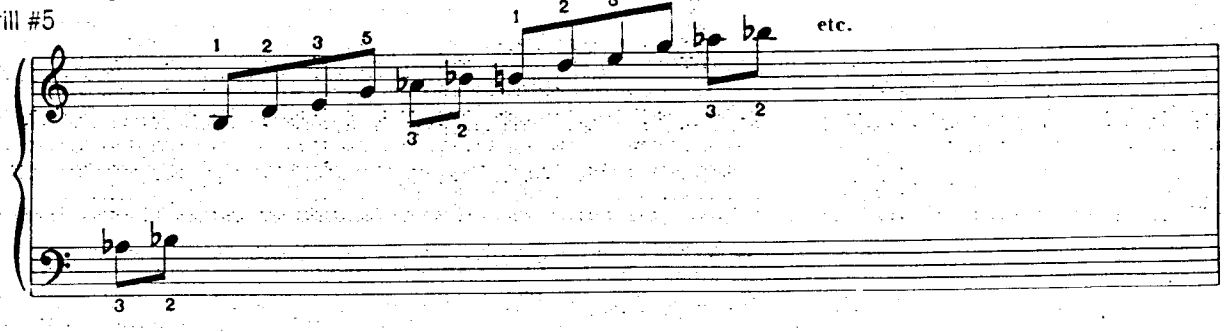


2) *Patterns*—The following drills will prove helpful as a transition into two-handed scales. Again, there are many possibilities, but these will make for a good start.

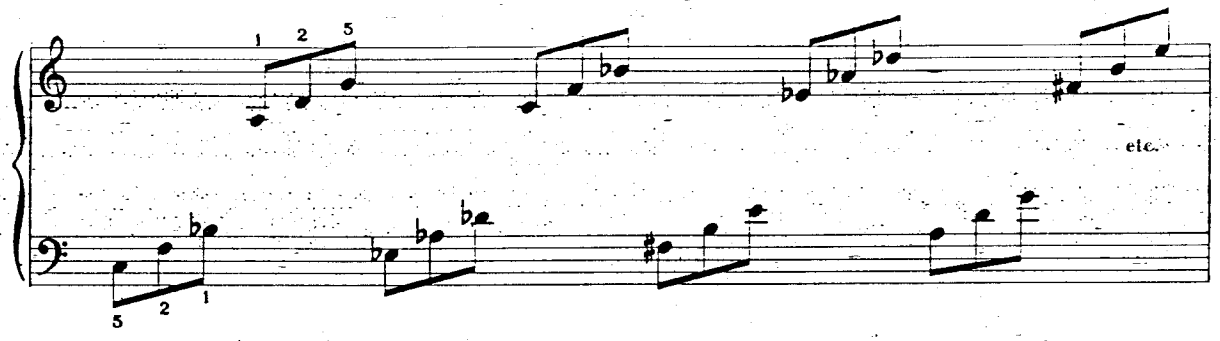
Drill #4



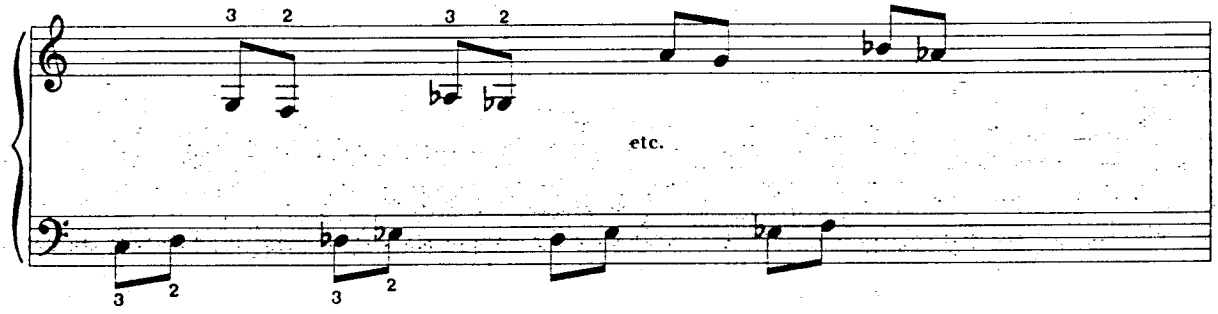
Drill #5



Drill #6—Perfect Fourths



Drill #7—Chromatic Seconds

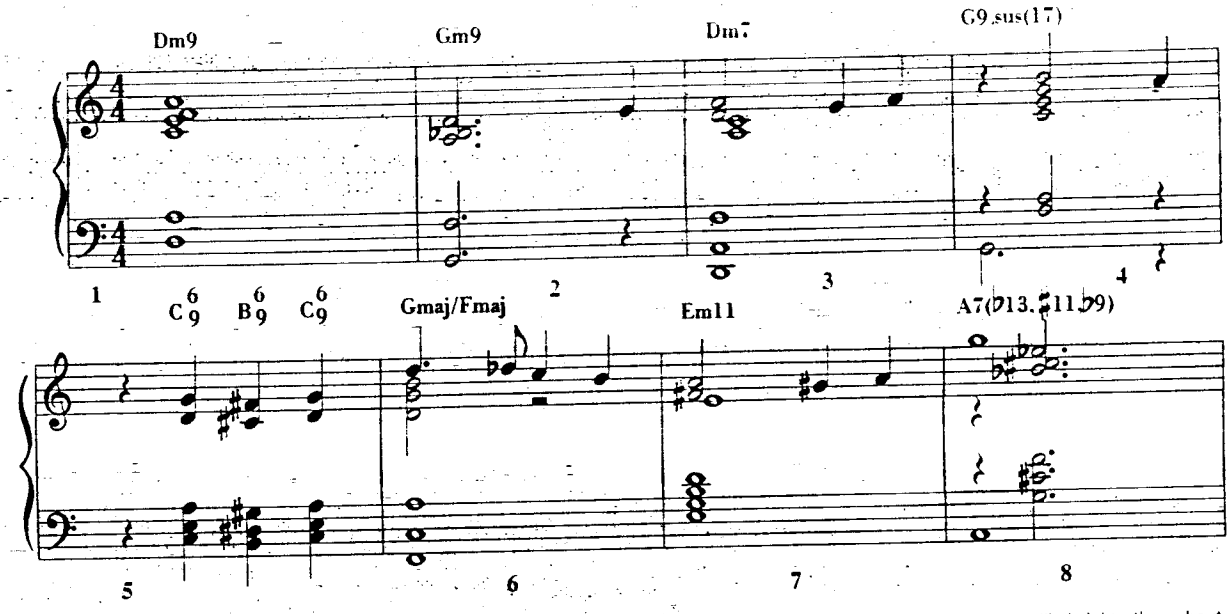


EASY TO LOVE

When I learn a standard tune, I like to sit down with the lead sheet and just find a way of interpreting it that feels comfortable to me. It's a process of making the melodies and the harmonies my own.

EASY TO LOVE

Cole Porter



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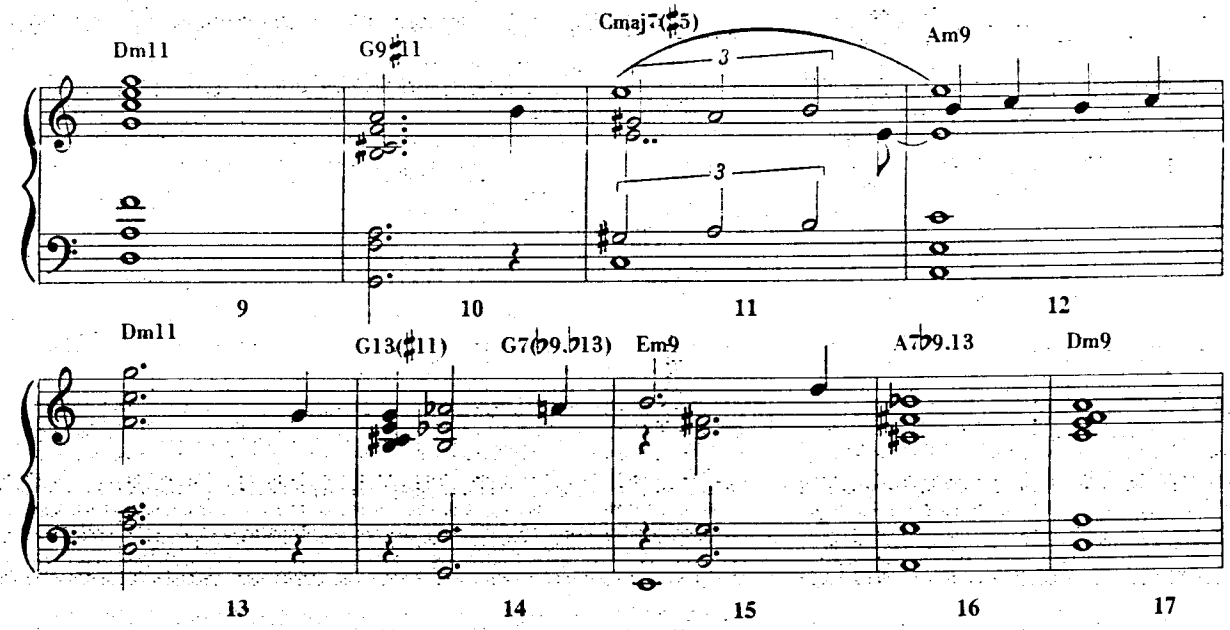
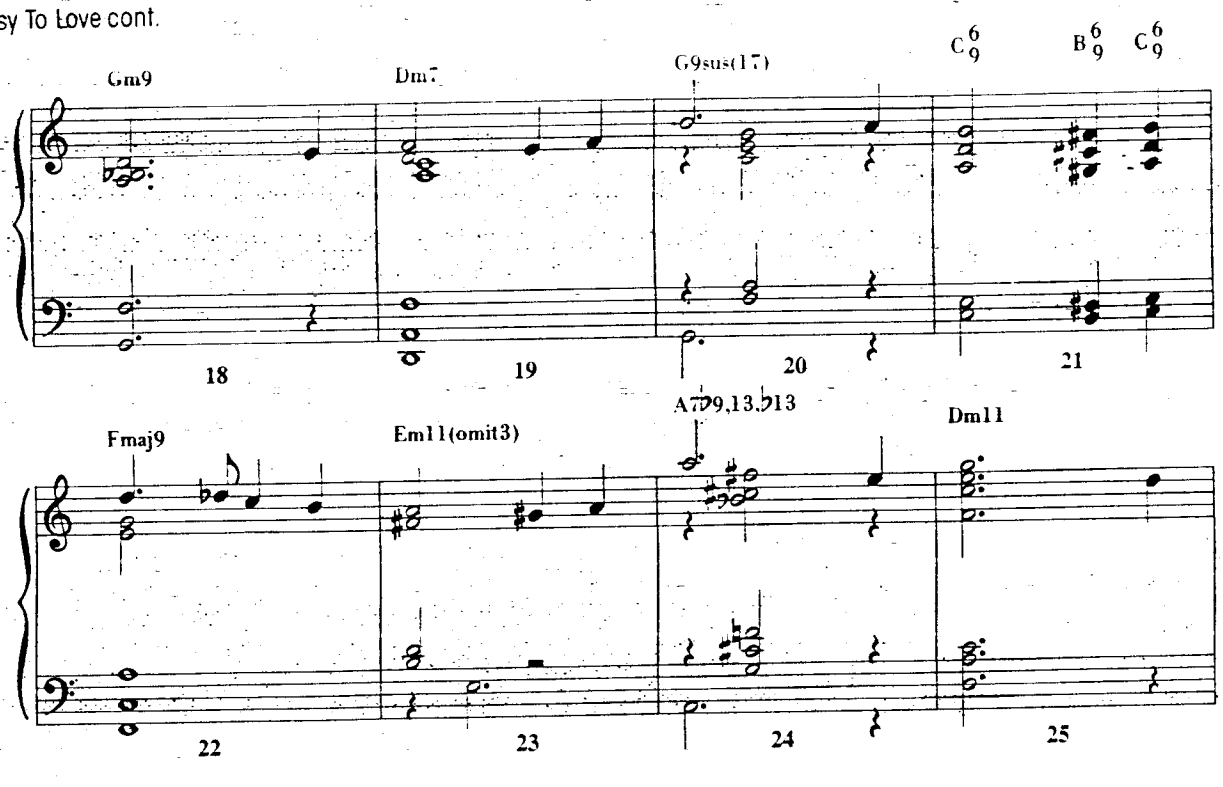
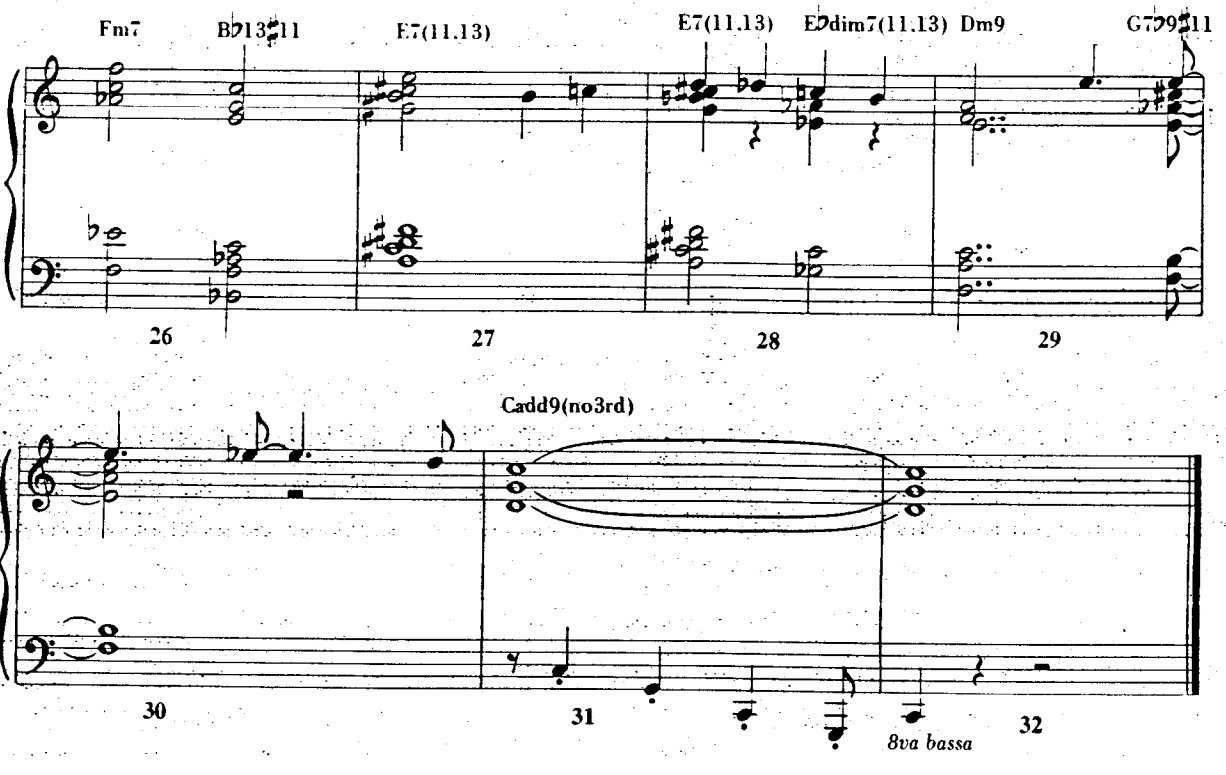



Gm9
Dm7
G9sus(17)
C6/9
B6/9
C6/9
18
19
20
21
Fmaj9
Em11(omit3)
A7♭9,13,♭13
Dm11
22
23
24
25

21

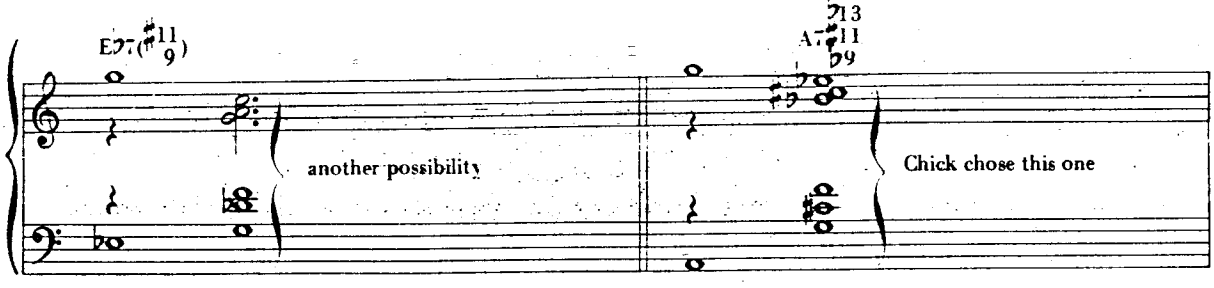

Fm7
B♭13♯11
E7(11.13)
E7(11.13)
E♭dim7(11.13)
Dm9
G7♭9♯11
26
27
28
29
Cadd9(no3rd)
30
31
32
8va bassa

EASY TO LOVE: A HARMONIC ANALYSIS

by John Novello

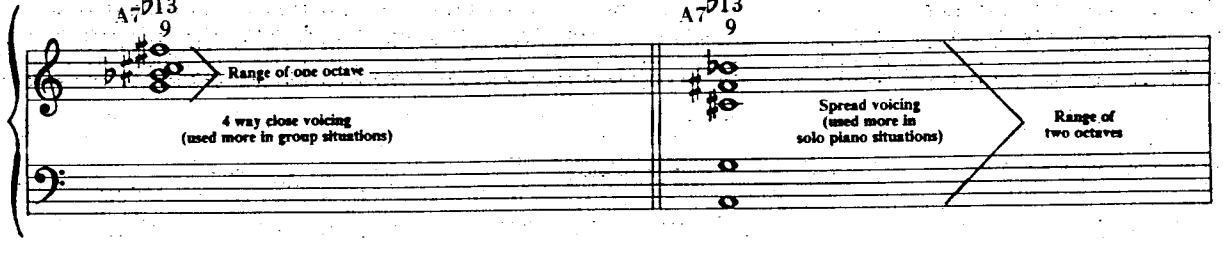
Chick's approach to this tune was the "solo piano" approach, meaning that the arrangement is made to sound complete on the piano without any other instruments involved. Had he been thinking of, for instance, a trio, the voicings used would have been a little different. Chick's use of full-spread voicings, along with available tensions and a few tasty chord substitutions, have added a nice touch. In general, though, he has stayed "in bounds" and has not reharmonized the tune at all—something to bear in mind, as too much reharmonization can destroy the whole mood of the composition!

The exceptions to the traditional changes occur in the form of a few substitutions, and they are as follows: In *bar 5*, he uses a device called "parallel structures," in which he simply harmonizes the existing melody note (F#) with the same voicing used on the previous G melody. This is a very popular device, which results here in a B69 chord. In *bar 8*, Chick's ear doesn't like the lead sheet change of F7, and so he changes it to a dominant 7th chord a fifth away from the following chord, D min 7. This results in an A7 chord, and is analyzed as a V7 of II-7 (A7 to D-7). The traditional chord, F7, is very weak, but it works nevertheless. The A7 Chick uses works better, as it is a stronger bass motion. E♭7 would also have worked quite well, as the next-strongest bass motion besides the interval of a fifth is a half-step (E♭7 to D-7). For example:



In *bar 11*, Chick simply changes the chord quality from a stock C maj 7 to C maj 7 #5, which he is fond of doing, as it creates an inner voice movement to the following A min 7 chord (Bill Evans was also noted for his unique inner voice movement). The purpose of inner voice movement of this type is to bring motion to an otherwise stagnant chord progression. In *bar 16*, as he mentions in the video, Chick alters the B melody to a B♭ in order to create the passing melody of B-B♭-A. This acts as a strong melodic and harmonic turnaround back to the main theme. The resultant new chord then becomes A7♭13, in order to accommodate the altered melody. Altering the melody like this, especially in this style, is done all the time and is a great way of giving new life to an arrangement. In *bar 26*, Chick uses a two-chord substitution for the sheet music chord of F min 6. The logic here is that F min 6 is exactly the same as a B♭9 chord, except for the different roots; and since any dominant 7 chord can be preceded by its relative II-7 chord (F-7 to B♭7), the two-chord substitution of F-7 to B♭7 for F-6 works quite nicely. In *bar 27*, Chick uses the III chord E7 in place of the I chord C maj. As he says on the tape, going directly to the E7 creates a surprise, as one normally wants to hear the standard resolution to the C maj 7 chord. This device is called "deceptive resolution."

With regard to Chick's voicings: as do most jazz keyboardists in a solo piano situation, Chick loves to voice his chord structures in spreads (chord structures spanning over an octave, which include the root of the left hand) and to use many tensions (9's, 11's, and 13's). This style creates a rich, full, moving sound. In an ensemble, the general rule of thumb is to leave out the root and comp with four-way close voicings (voicings having a span of less than an octave, which are normally used for comping).



MOOD INDIGO

Duke's music and Monk's music have a similarity that inspires me to kind of "cross-fertilize" them. I think Monk was influenced a lot by Duke. They're two of my favorite composers and I find it easy to know their original intentions when I play their compositions.

MOOD INDIGO

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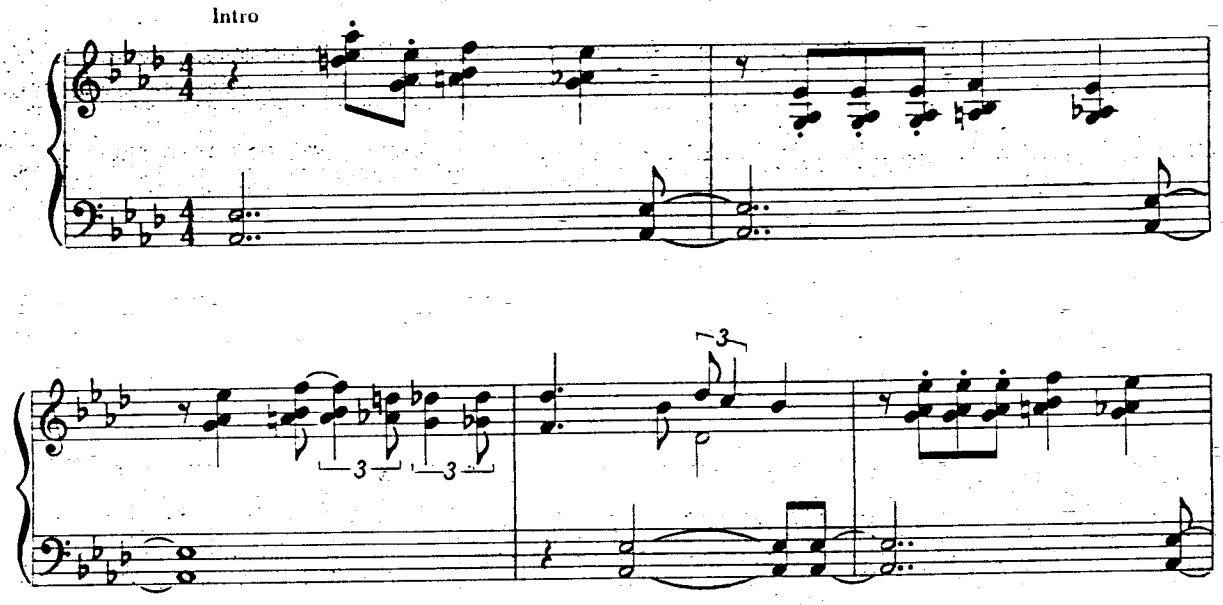
MOOD INDIGO

E, A, B, D

Duke Ellington, Albany Bigard, Irving Mills



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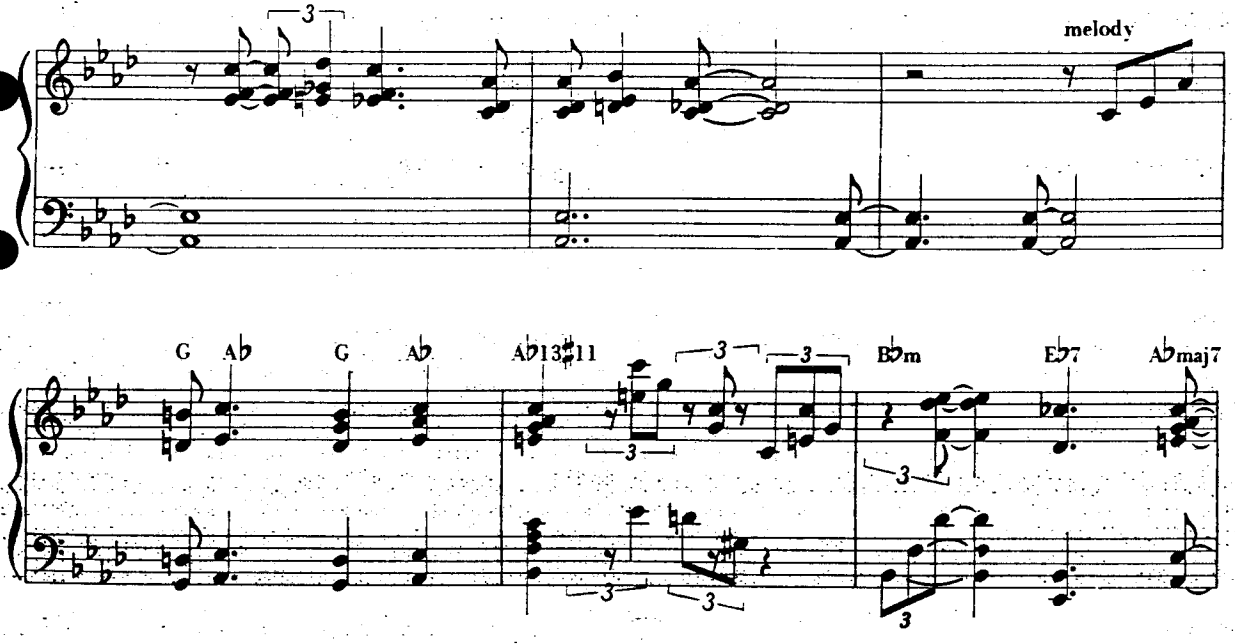

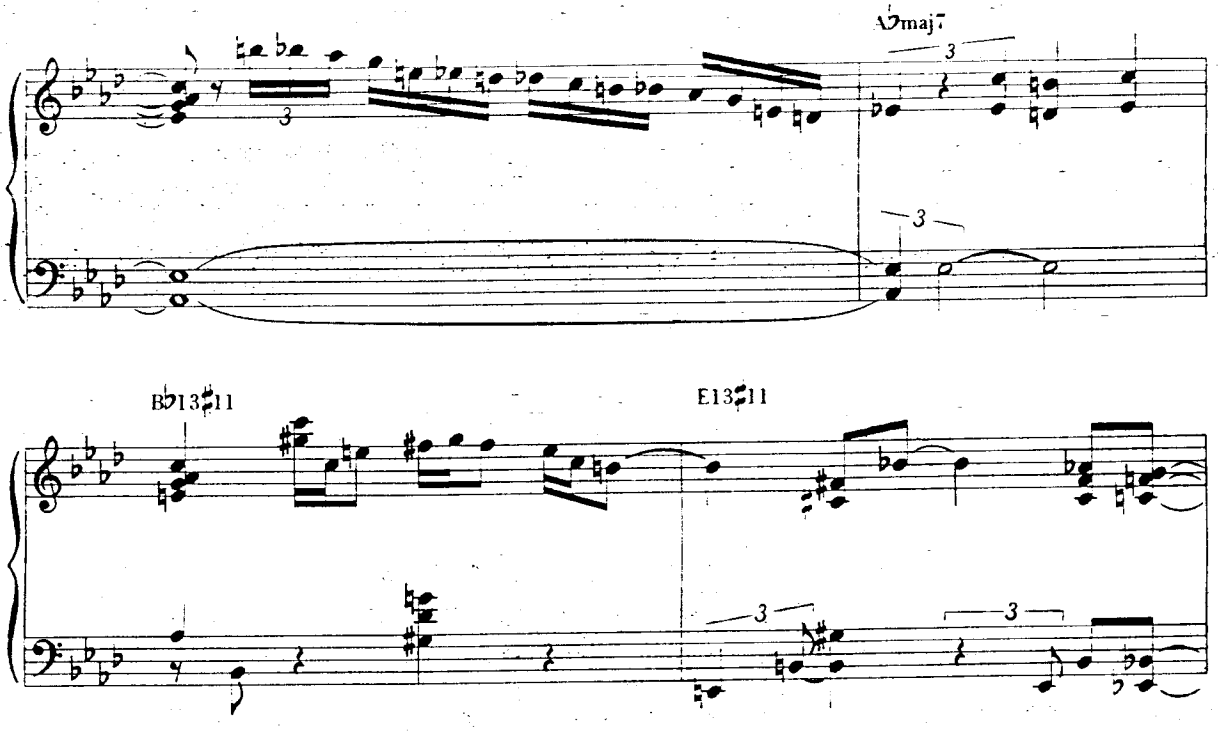

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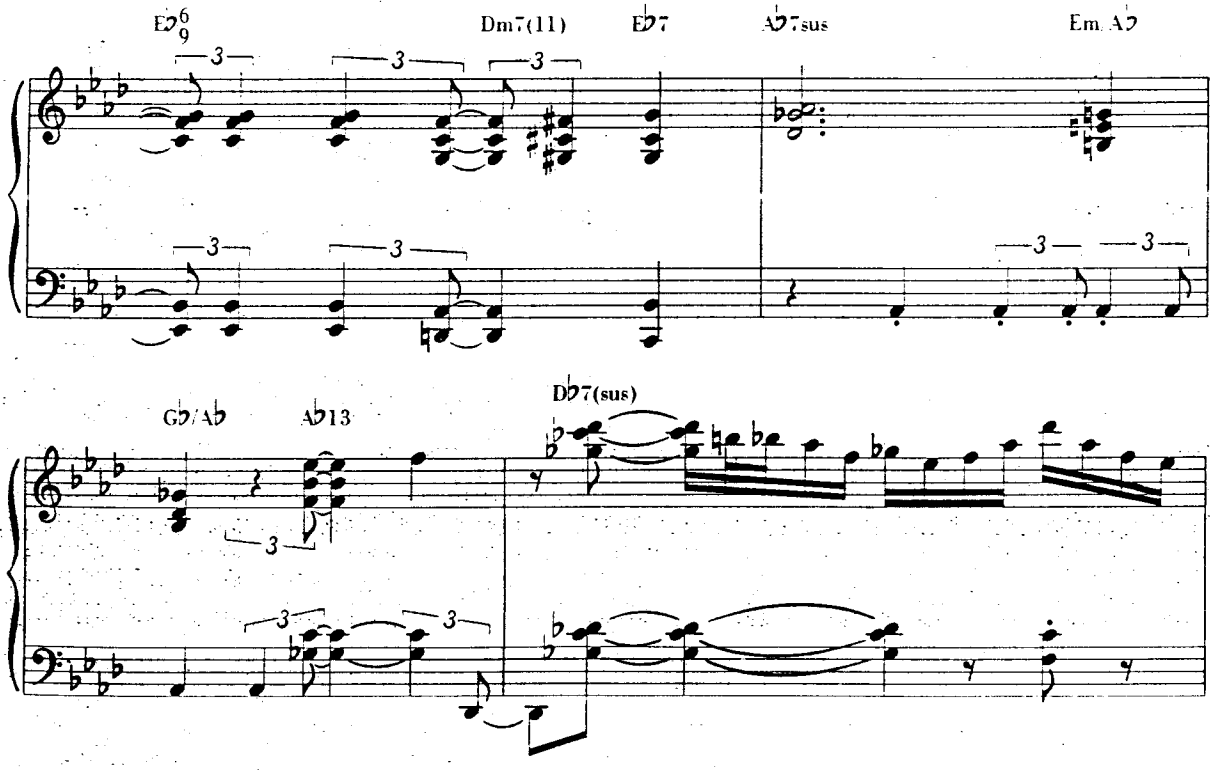
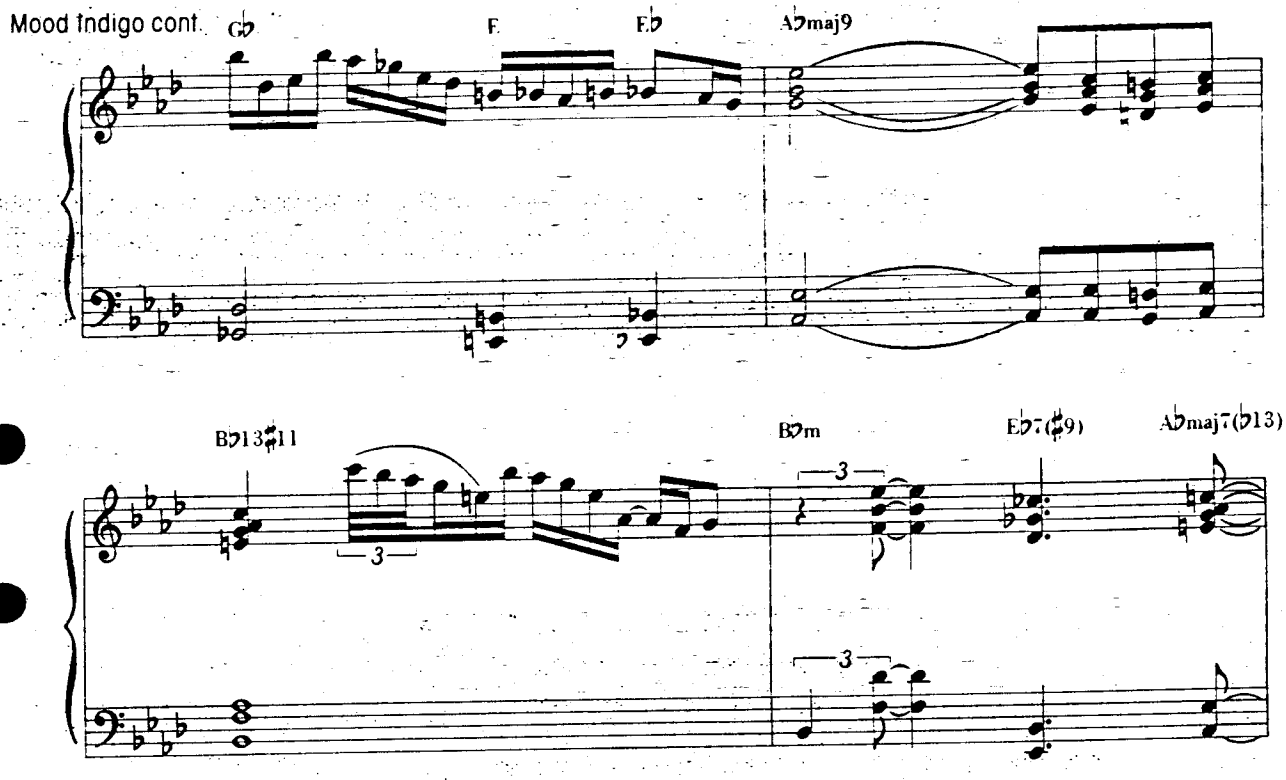
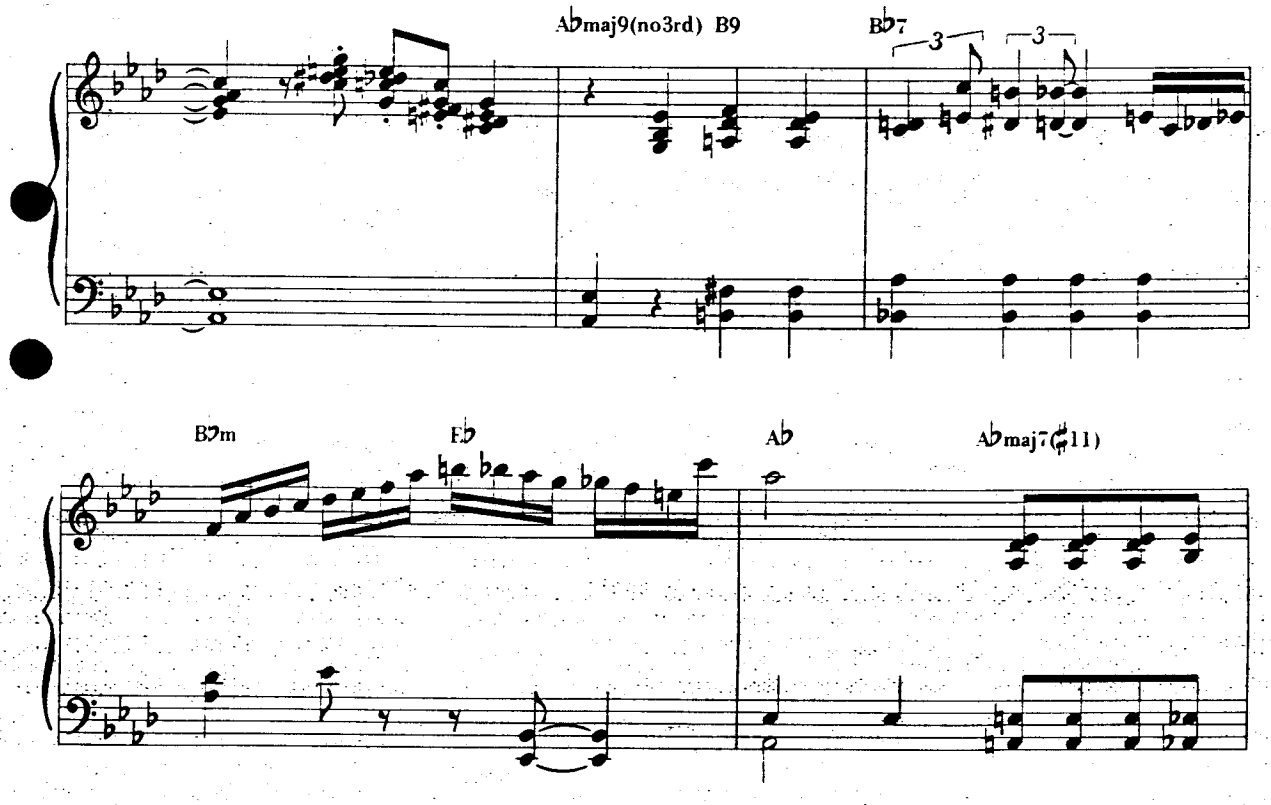
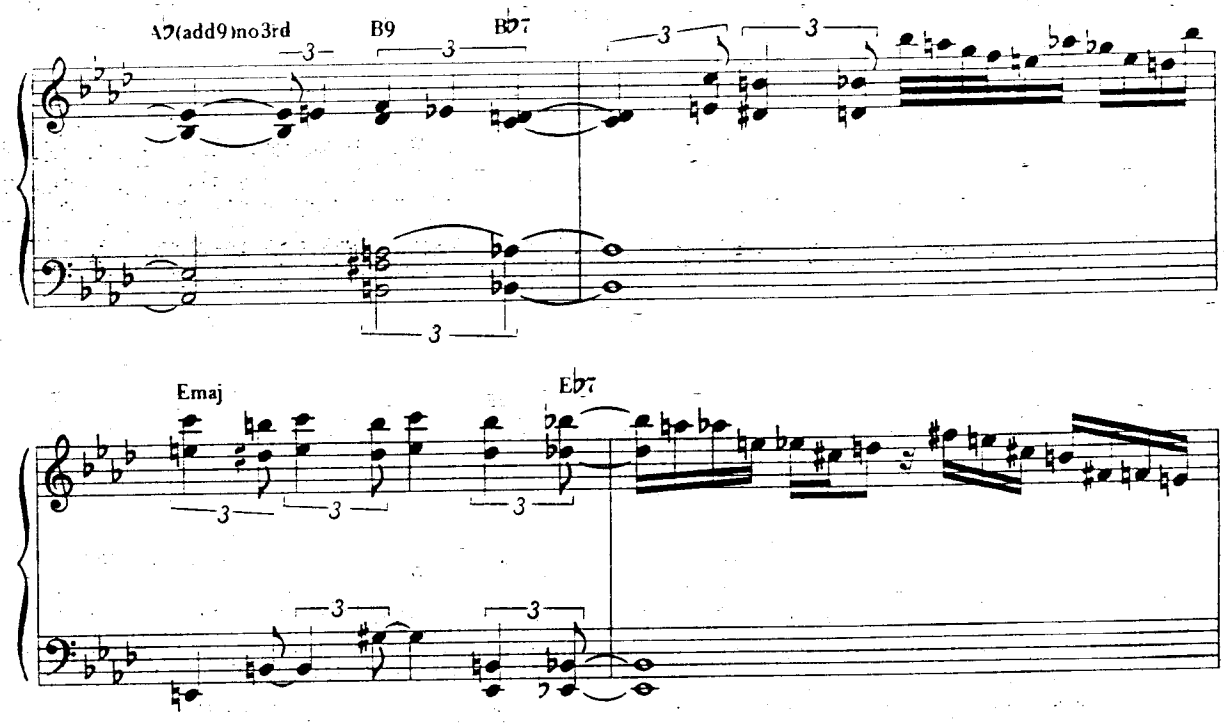



Mood Indigo cont.
Gb
F
Eb
Abmaj9
Bb13#11
Bbm
Eb7(#9)
Abmaj7(b13)
3
3
3

31


Abmaj9(no3rd) B9
Bb7
3
3
Bbm
Eb
Ab
Abmaj7(#11)

32



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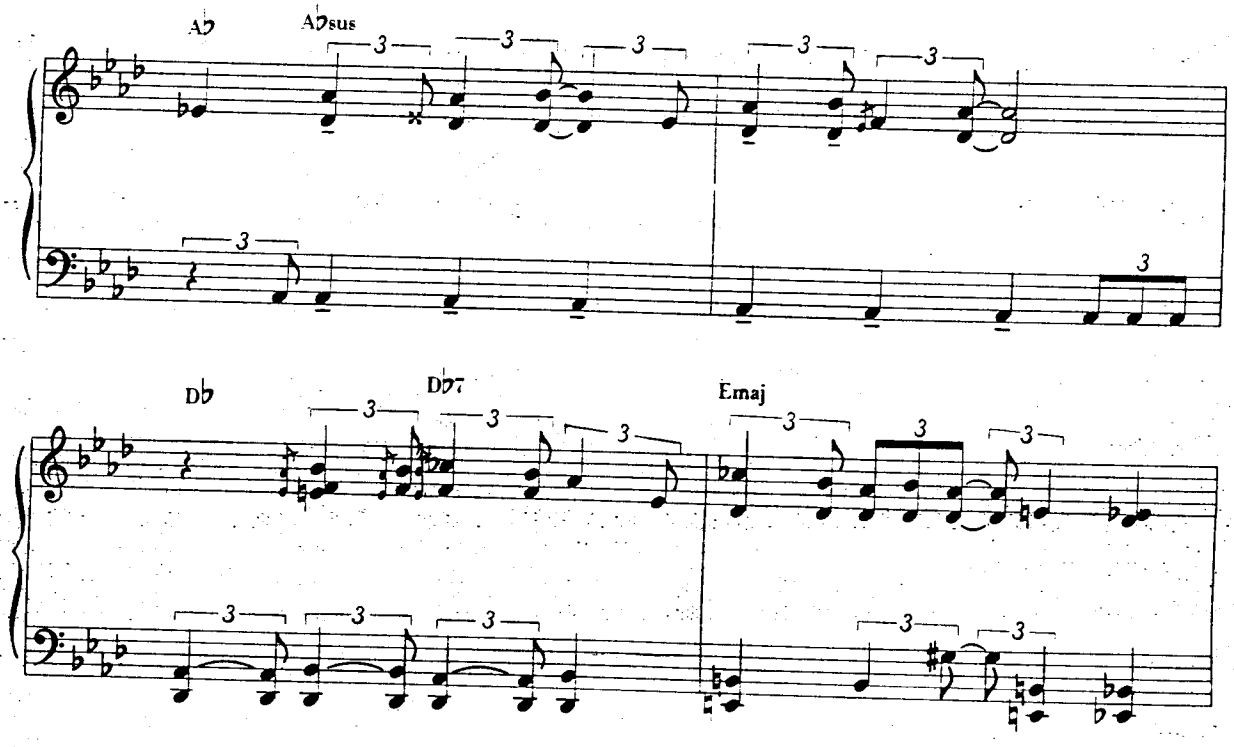

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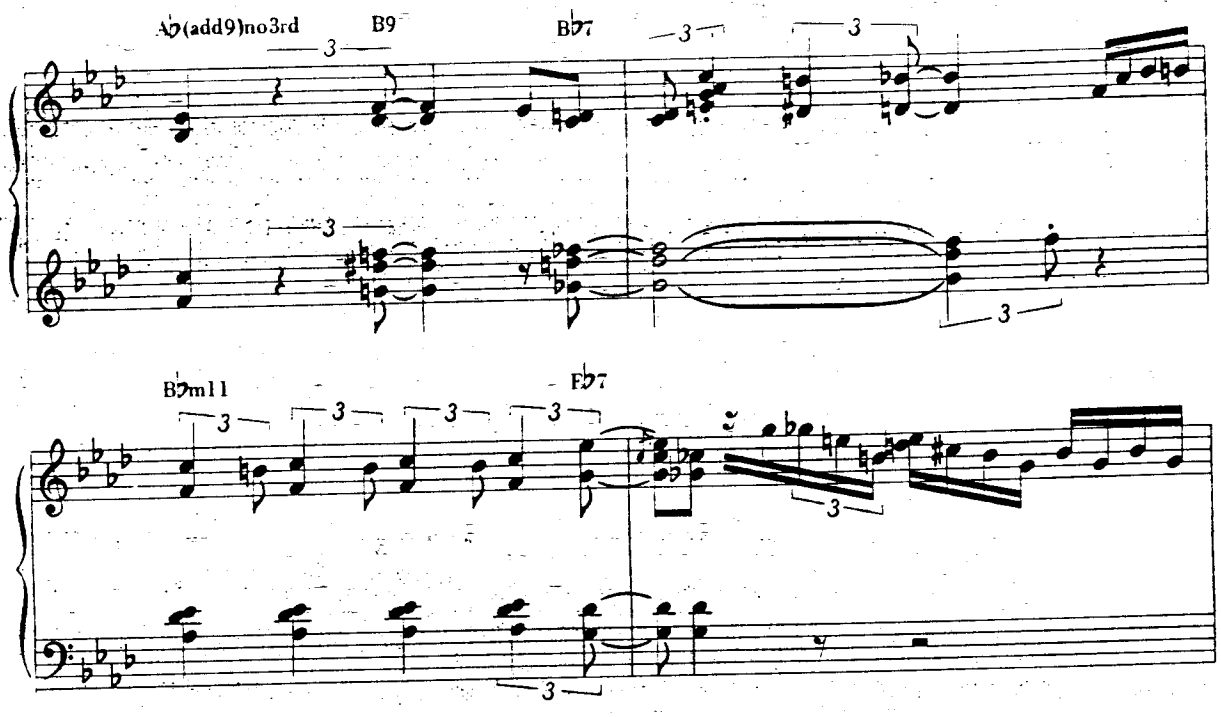

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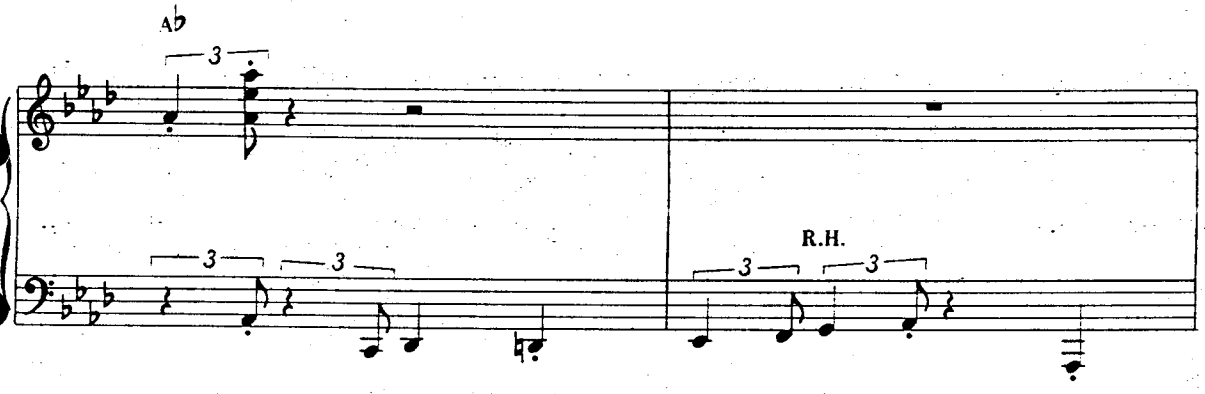
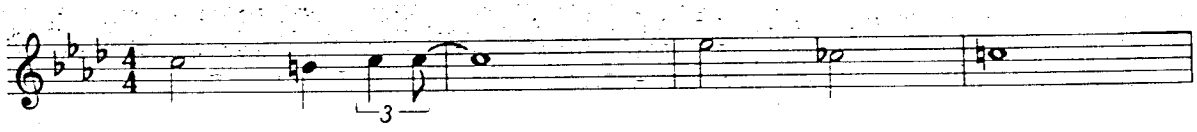
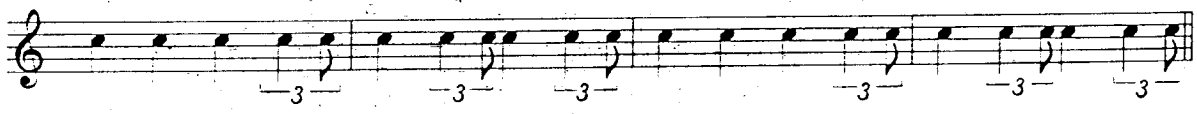


MOOD INDIGO—
RENDERING A MELODY

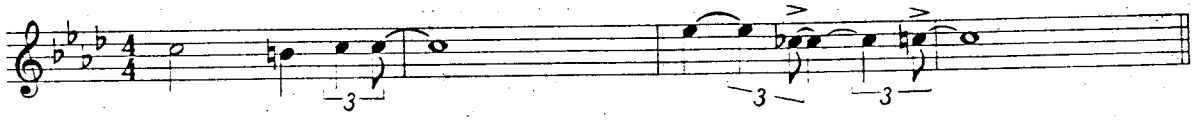
Ex. 1: Melody—Play the rhythm of the melody totally straight, with no contrasting rhythms.



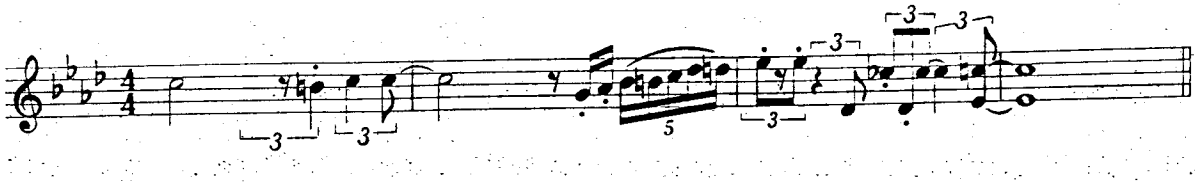
Ex. 2: Drums—Slow, swing beat.



Ex. 3: Keep imagining that slow, swing beat and then play the melody.



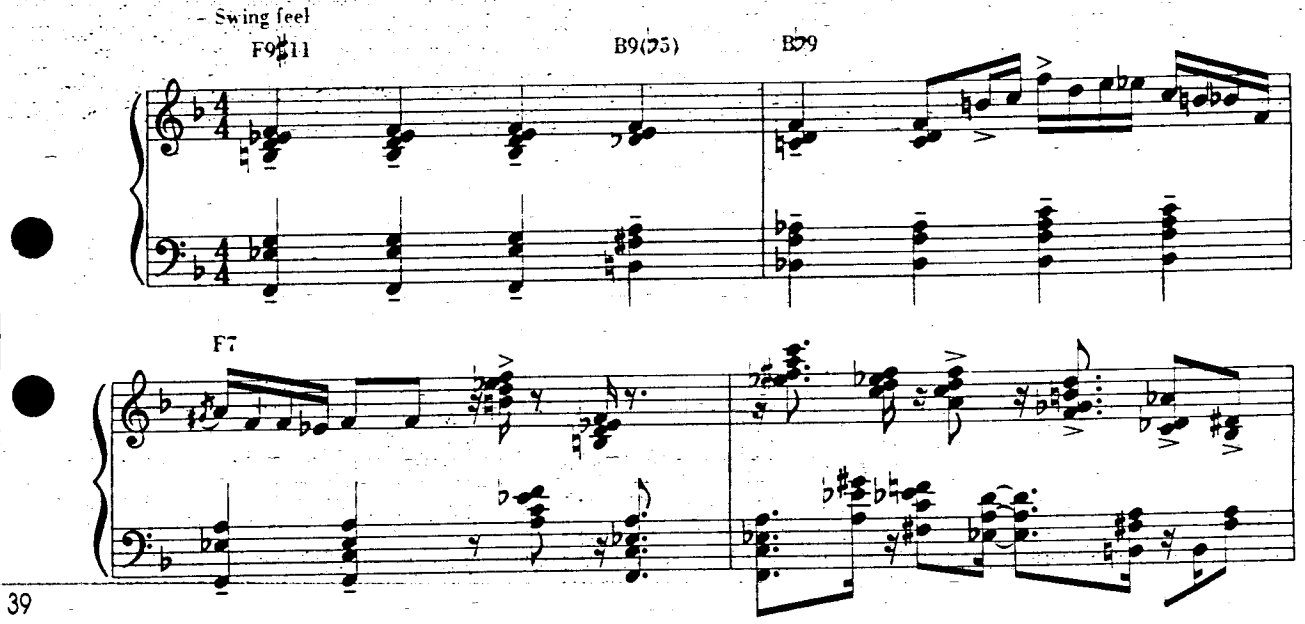
Ex. 4: Keeping that basic rhythm, embellish the melody by adding other rhythms.

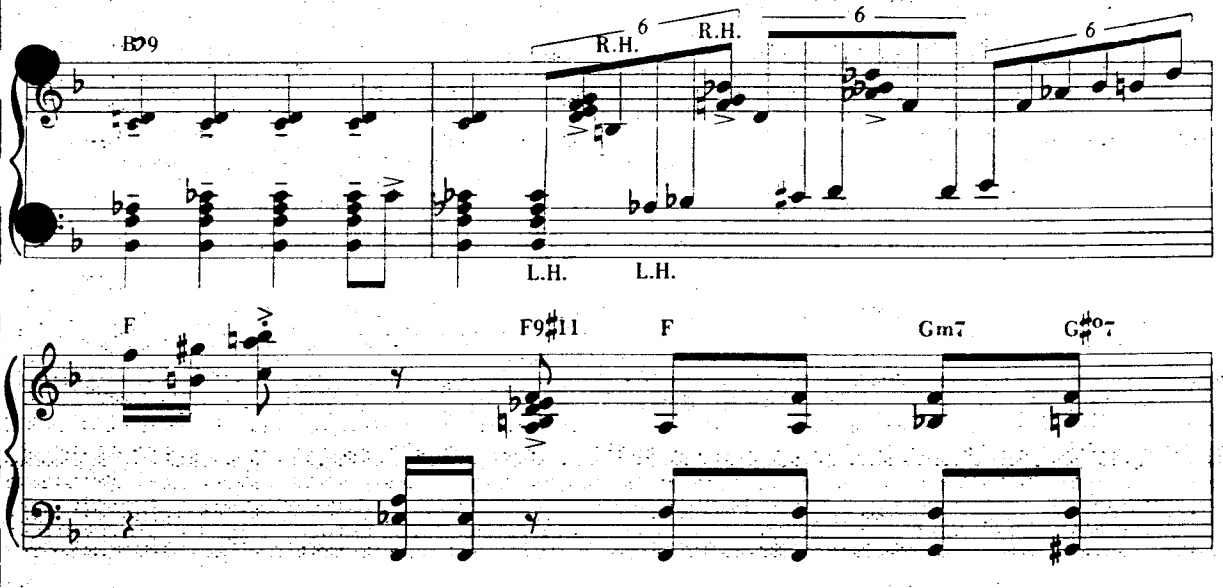


Do this with other tunes. First, play the rhythm of the melody straight. Then imagine what a drummer might play underneath it. Then play the melody again with that rhythm you're imagining. Add other rhythms, keeping that basic rhythm in your imagination.

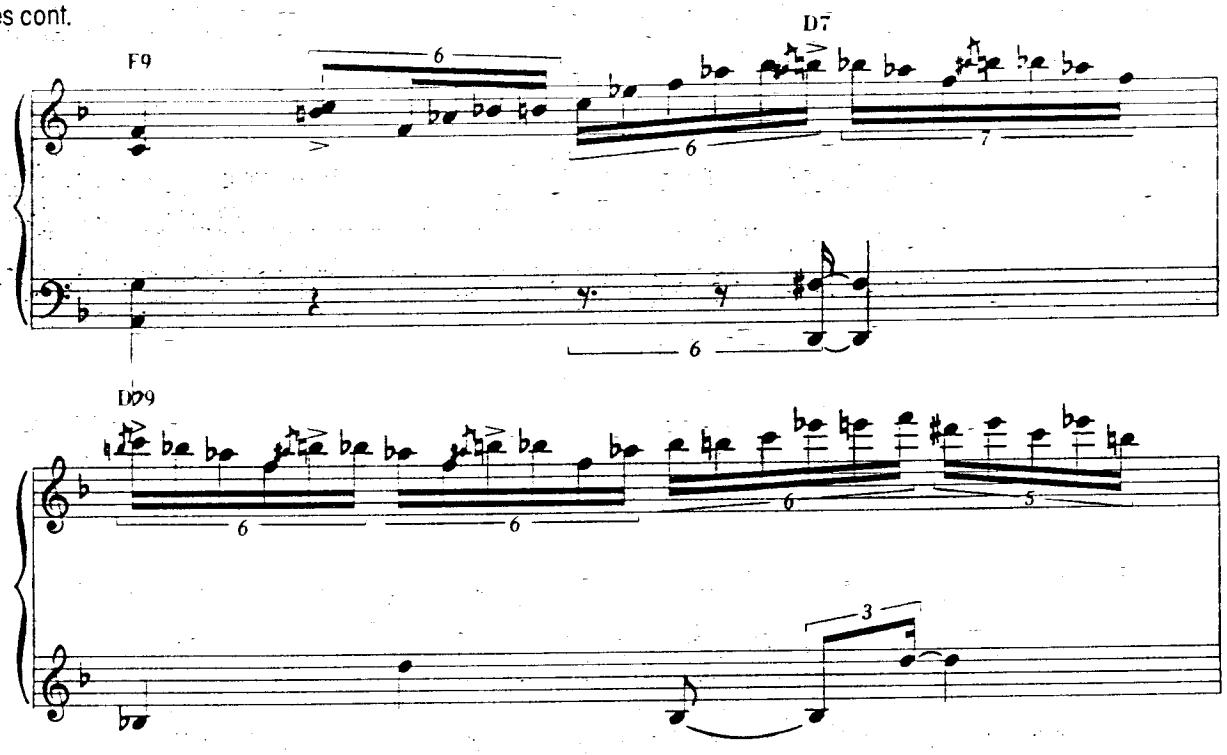
BLUES—LAST CHORUS

The blues are woven into the culture in such a way that it would be difficult not to know the blues and be alive. Even the wailing and chanting of the musics of other lands seems to relate to the blues. It's the basic cry of humanity dealing with its bare survival. Anyone who gives some vent to this feeling will be playing the blues in his own way.





Blues cont.



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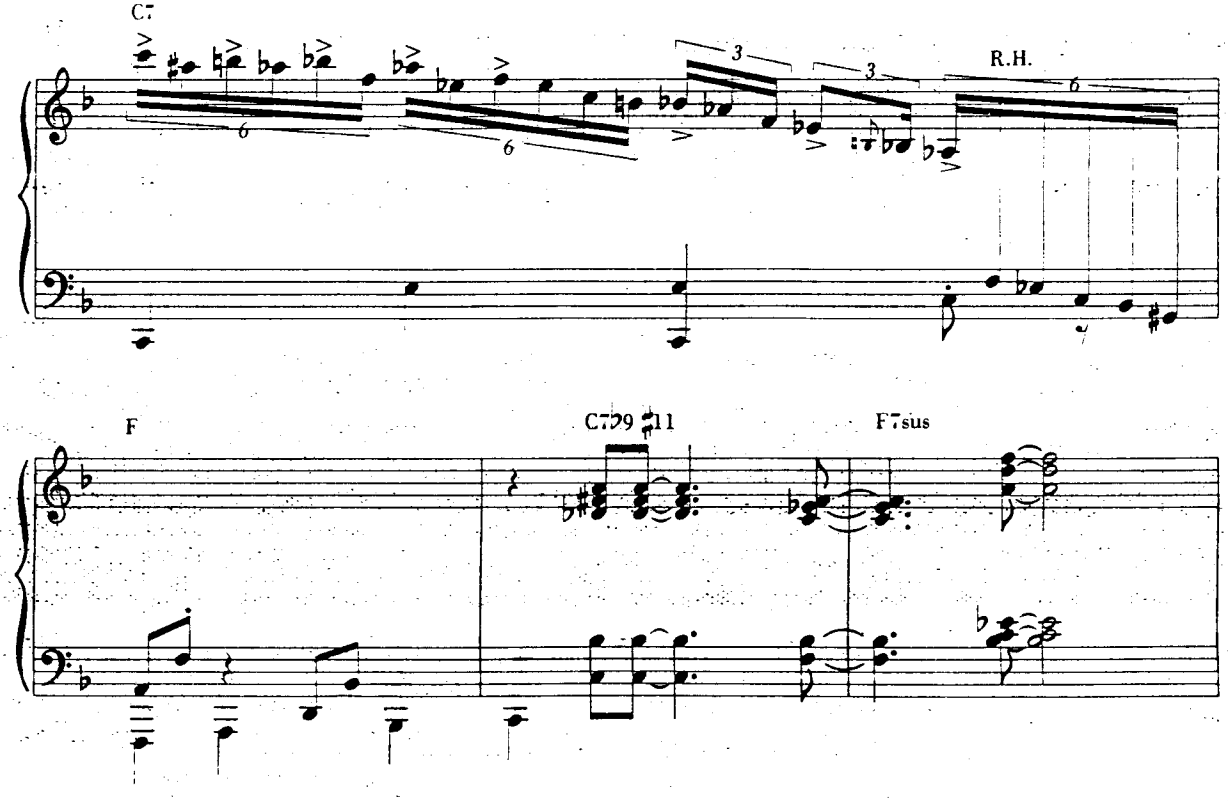


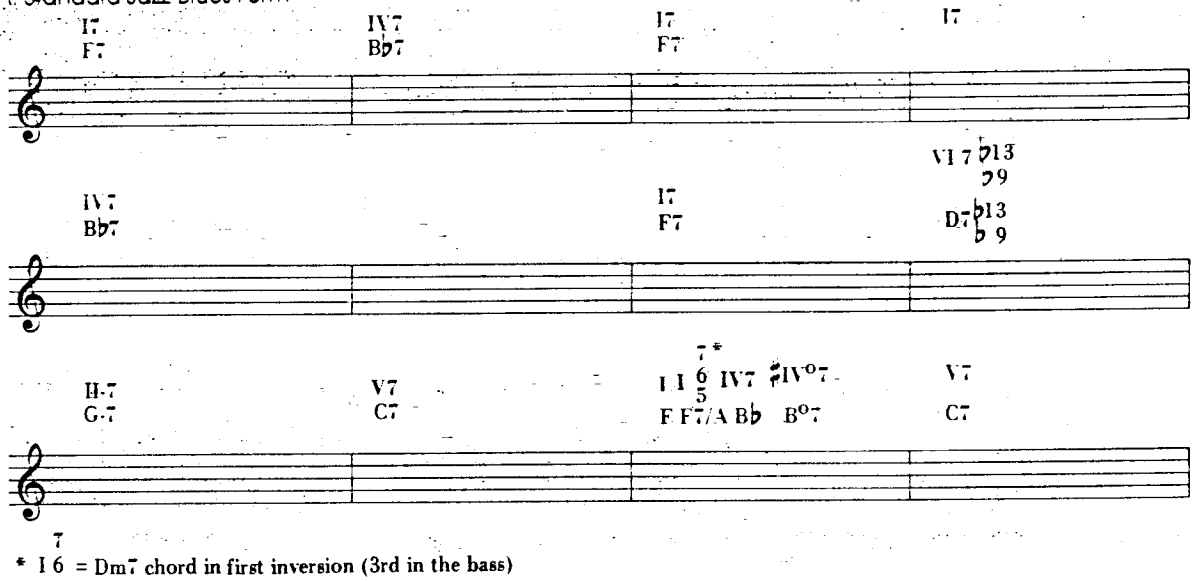
42

THE BLUES: AN ANALYSIS

by John Novello

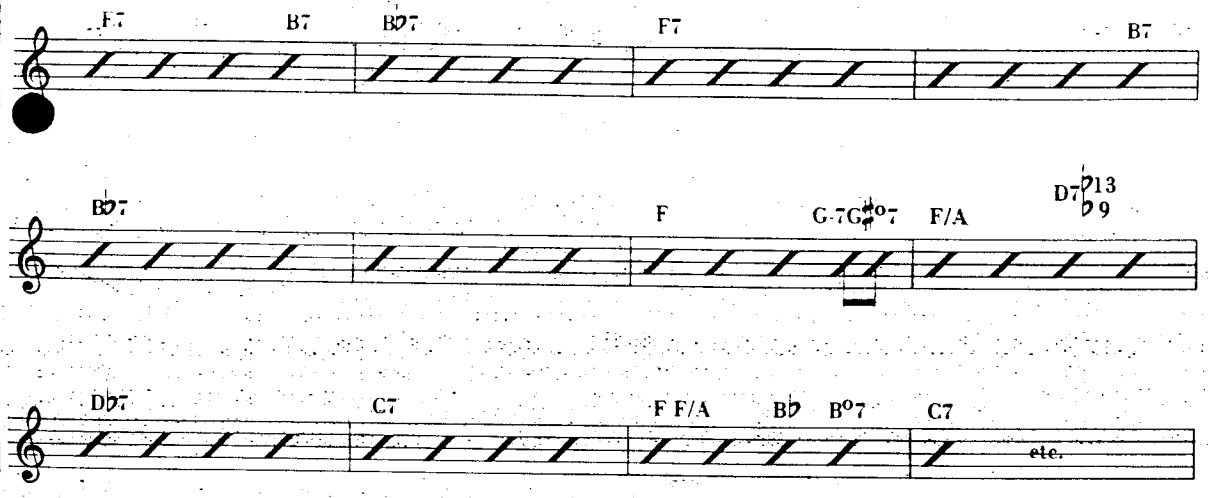
To any musician, the blues means a fairly fixed set of harmonic changes; over the years, these changes have been harmonized as needed and wanted. Although there are many variations of the blues, Chick uses a relatively standard 12-bar jazz blues in the key of F. Note the following analysis of his last chorus:

Ex. 1A. Standard Jazz Blues Form



7
* I 6 = Dm7 chord in first inversion (3rd in the bass)
5

1B Chick's Variation

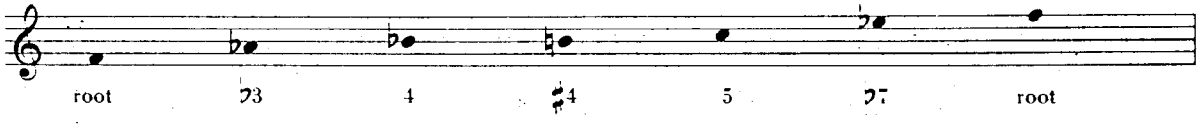


1) Harmonic Analysis
In *bar 1*, Chick has added a B7 as a passing approach chord a half-step above the B♭7 chord in bar 2. He does this again as a transition to bar 4. In *bar 6*, he again uses some approach chords to the D7 chord in bar 7. G-7 to G# dim 7 is a common way to connect F7 in root position with F7 in first inversion (third in the bass). This creates good bass motion and sets up the interval of a fifth above the next chord, D7, which is of course excellent bass motion (bass motion F-G-G#-A-D). Chick then uses a D♭7, a common substitution for the II chord (G min 7). Going to the D♭7 instead of the standard G min 7 serves two functions: first, the dominant 7 sounds more bluesy, and second, we again get a strong bass motion of D7-D♭7-C7 (note: the interval of a fifth above or a half-step above the intended target chord is considered to be excellent bass motion). The last two bars of any blues is considered a turnaround, which means a progression of chords that leads us back to the top of the tune. Since this is Chick's last time through, he simply ends the tune after the turnaround. Again, he does something fresh and colorful by ending on a sus type dominant 7 structure instead of a typical straight dominant 7 chord.

2) Voicings
Another thing Chick does that makes his interpretation of the blues unique is his strong use of tensions. In *bars 1, 3, and 4*, the #11 (B natural) on the F7 chord adds a bit of Monk! Same with the flat 9 on the B♭7 chord in *bars 5 & 6*. Chick refers to this note (again B natural) as simply a "weird" note. Interestingly enough, this is a very important note to the blues sound in this key.

3) Blues Sound
The "blues sound" is composed of two elements:
A) The blues scale: Root, ♭3, 4, #4, 5, ♭7, root.

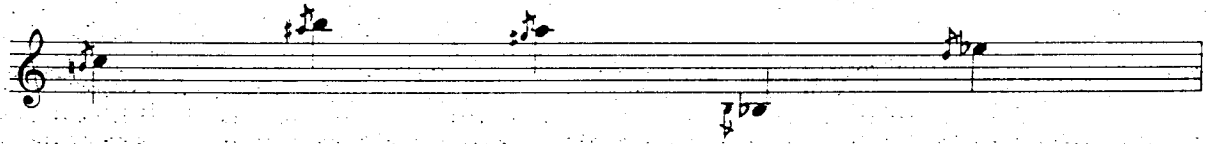
Ex. 2: Standard Blues Scale



As you can see, the #4 is an integral part of the blues sound and Chick takes advantage of it not only in his chord voicings, but also melodically in his entire improvisation (see bars 8, 9, and 10).

B) Blues tones: crushed, usually non-diatonic notes that approach scale tones, but most often are chord tones (see example below). Not only does Chick use this sound in his blues solo (especially bars 8 and 9), it is an integral part of all his melodic playing.

Ex. 3: Crushed Blues Notes—F Blues



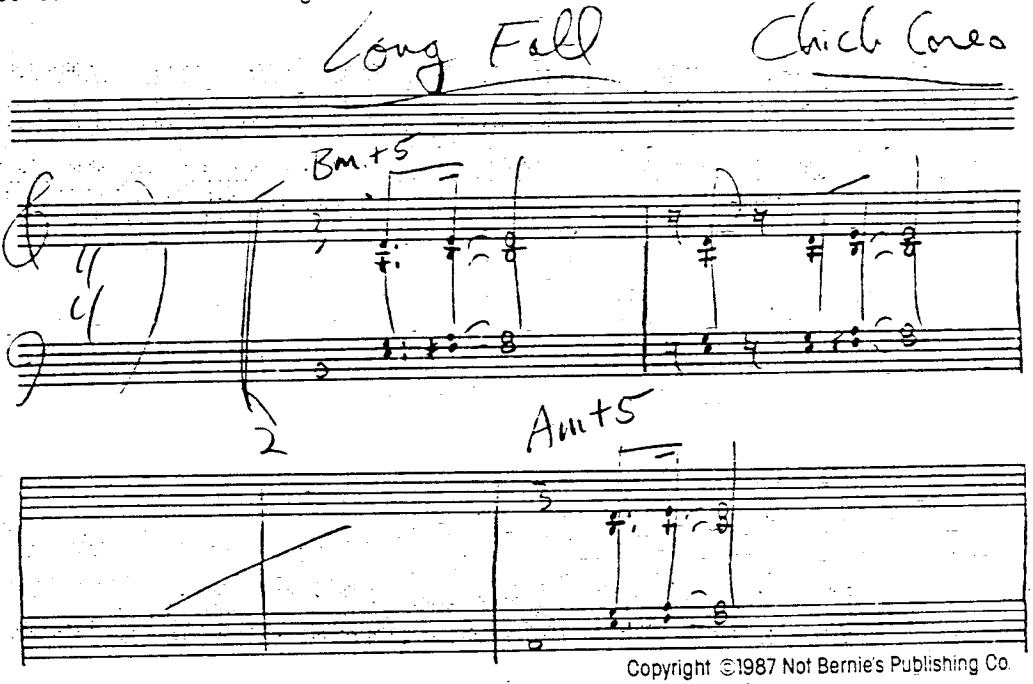
Chick adds even more color to this blues sound through the use of *clusters*, which are chord voicings predominantly made up of minor and major seconds (see bars 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6). Rhythmically, he adds a nice departure from the norm by his use of swinging accented sextuplets. This really brings this chorus to life and adds the final touch and energy to the ending.

Chick actually applies his two-handed scale-playing concept to chords (see bars 3, 4, and 6 especially).

As Chick points out in the end, he likes expressive music, and the 12-bar blues is just such a vehicle. Anything goes! Just keep the basic 12-bar form and basic chord pattern and add a touch of honest emotion and you're off!

LONG FALL

Tommy B. plays this particular rhythm great (the Baiõn from Brazil); so I conceived of that kind of general groove for this piece. The B section was added as a little relief to the basic vamp



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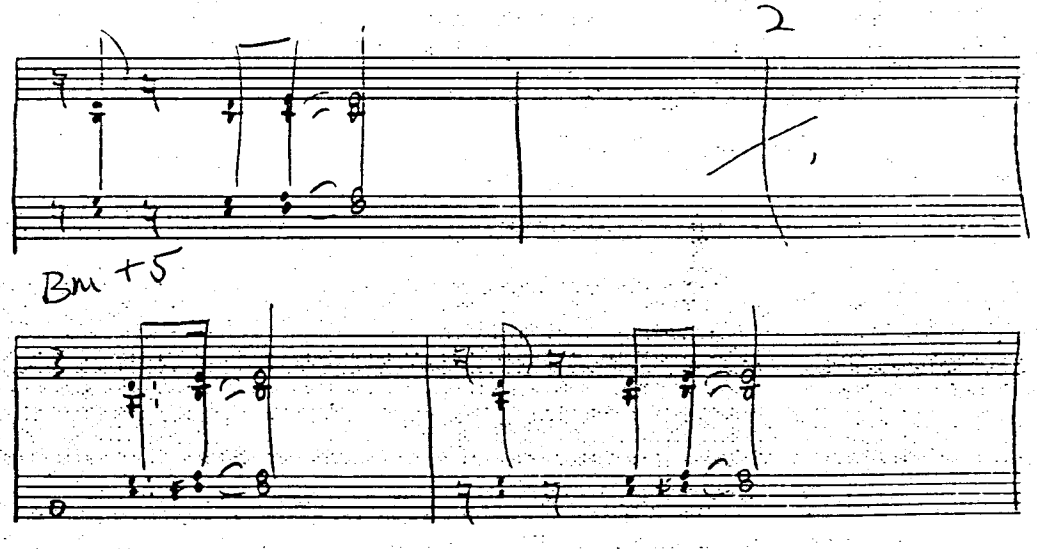
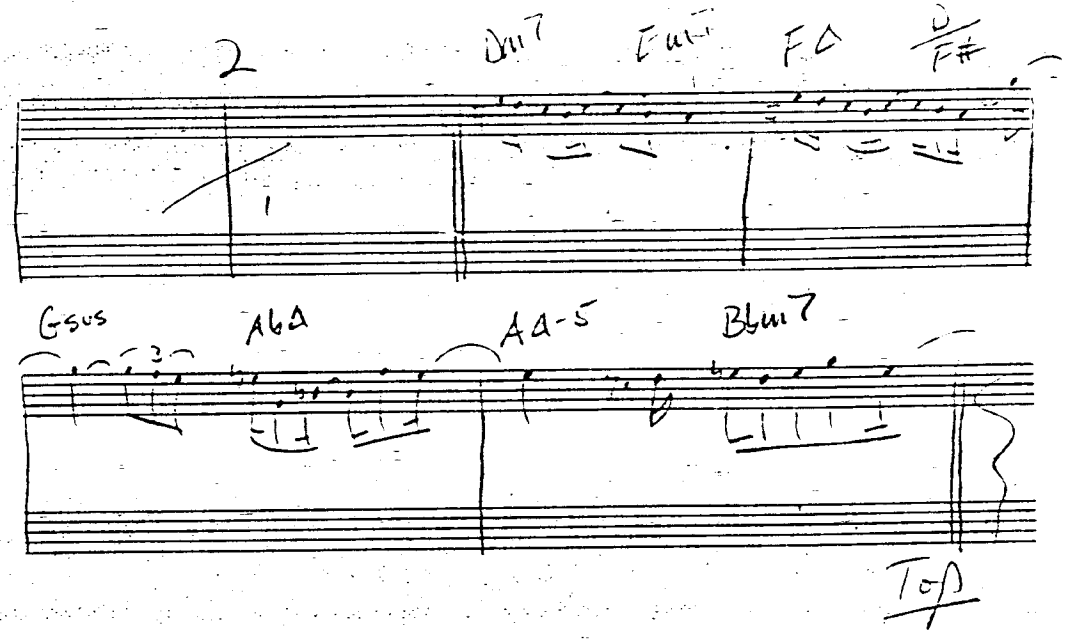


Long Fall cont.



'LONG FALL": FORM AND HARMONIC ANALYSIS

by John Novello

1) FORM

The form of this composition is analyzed as simply A-B, section A being 12 bars while section B is 4 bars, making this a simple 16-bar tune.

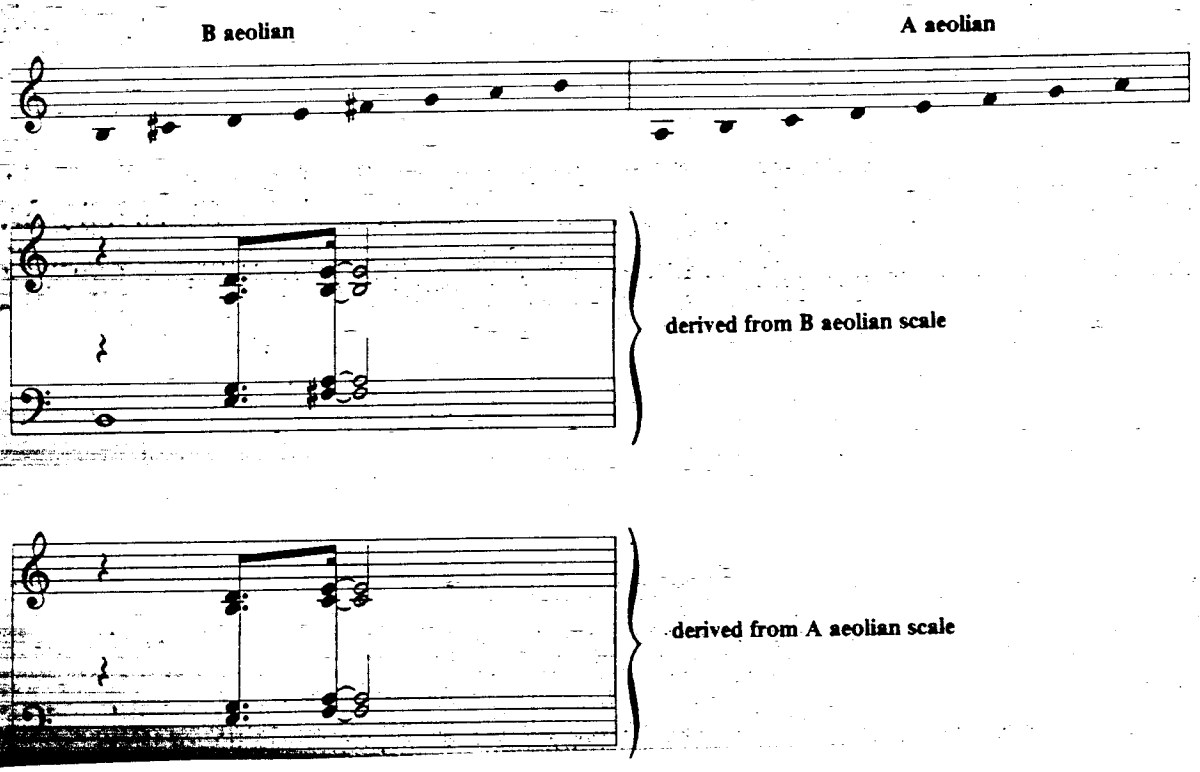
2) HARMONIC ANALYSIS

The A section is modal, meaning the melody and harmony is based on a certain mode or scale, while the B section derives from an ascending bass line which modulates to G major (bar 15), and then chromatically ascends back to home base, a B minor color. There are a variety of minor modes. In this case, although Chick uses the chord symbols of B min+5 and A min+5, the voicings he uses in section A could be more accurately described as coming from the aeolian modes of B minor and A minor. (See Ex. 1)

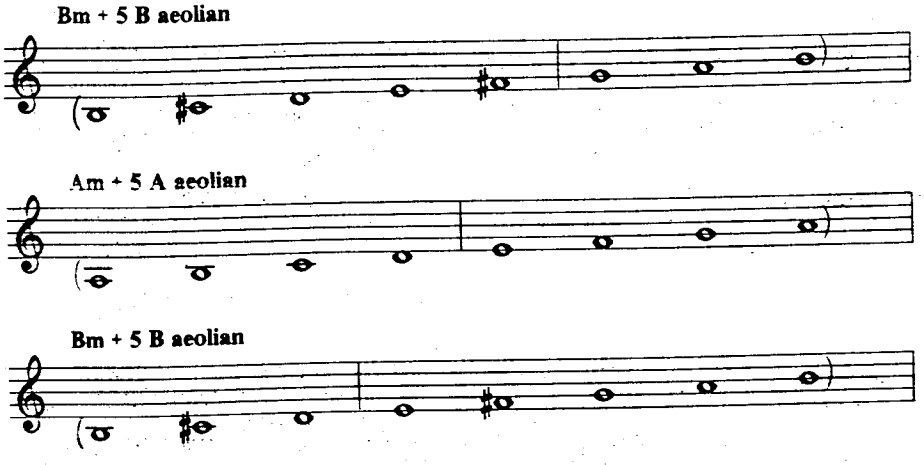
Regarding the B section harmony, Chick just uses his ear and harmonizes the ascending bass line he created with different-color chord qualities, and then composes a melody drawn from the implied scales of these chords.

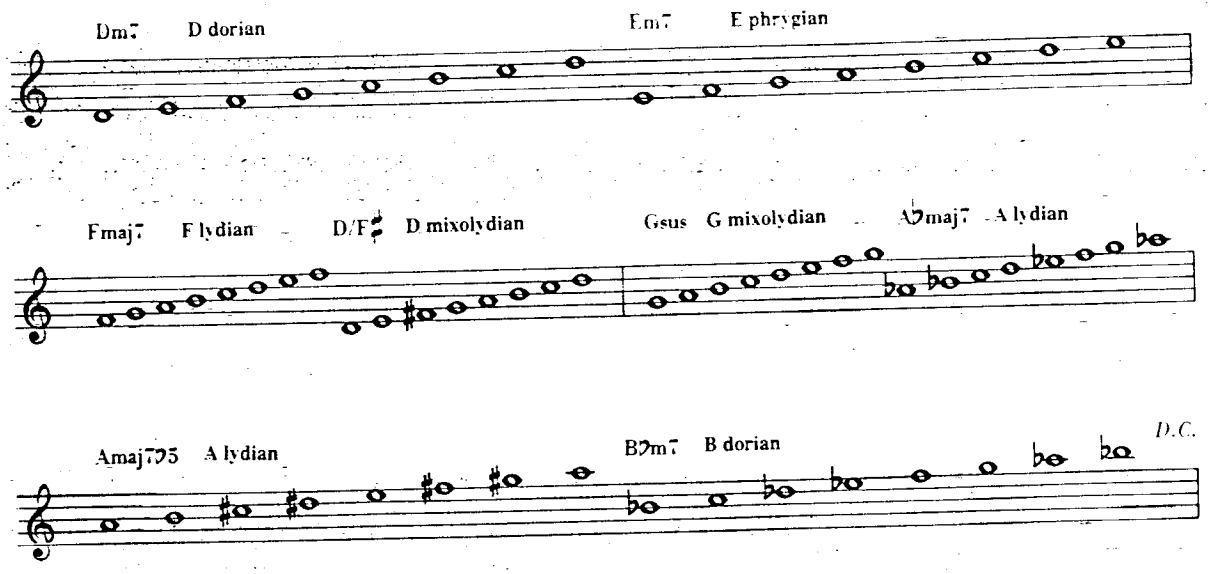
Here are the various scales which could be used as a basis for improvisation. Note that in performing this composition, Chick and the band take many rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic liberties—like playing notes outside the basic scale, adding chromatic passing chords, and stretching the basic rhythm at times—which is typical of this kind of Latin fusion style. Overall, though, Chick sticks very closely to the basic modes and harmony. (See Ex. 2)

Ex-1


B aeolian
A aeolian
derived from B aeolian scale
derived from A aeolian scale

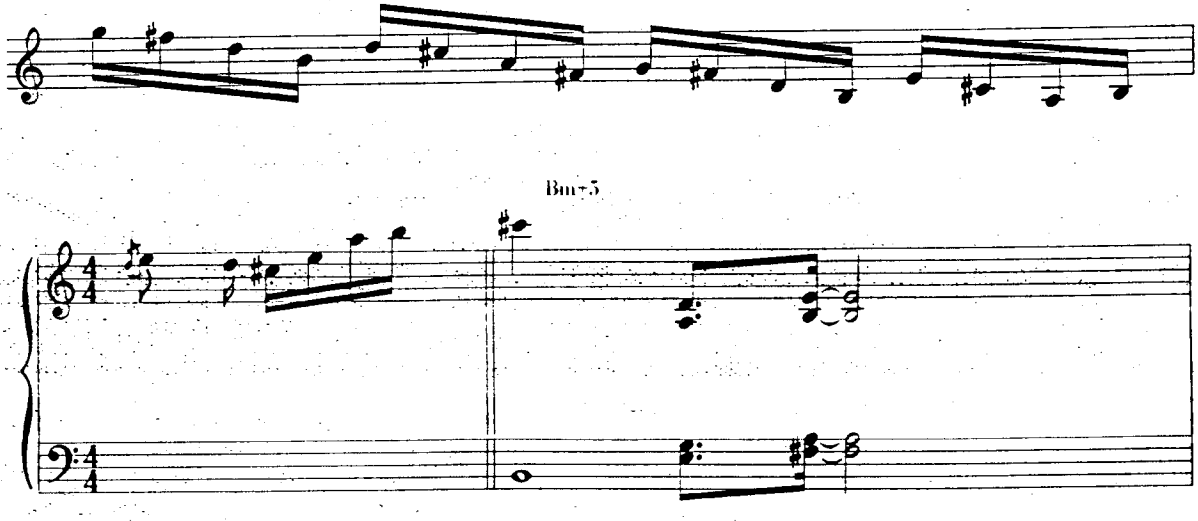
Ex. 2

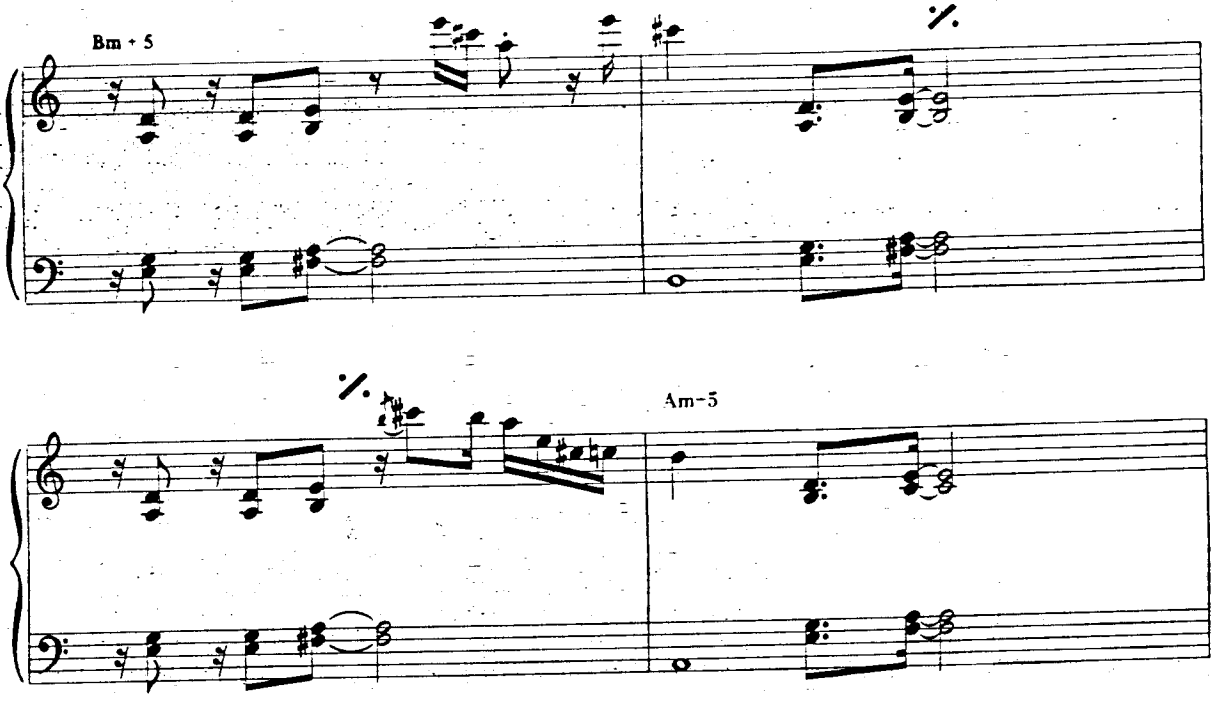

Bm + 5 B aeolian
Am + 5 A aeolian
Bm + 5 B aeolian



Chick's application of the various scales used in "Long Fall" by John Novello

With the exception of the C natural in bar 4 (which is simply an approach note to the root B from a half-step above), and the D natural in bar 16 (which also is an approach note to the 11th, E*b*, from a half-step below), all melody notes are from the indicated modes. Even the scale that Chick suggests using is actually just notes derived from the B aeolian. The pattern that he suggests, though, adds a nice dimension to the straight B aeolian and gives him a basis for the type of improvising and melodic construction being done. The notes in the pattern are all from the B aeolian mode—it's just the shape or intervals of the scale pattern which set the overall concept that Chick does so well!





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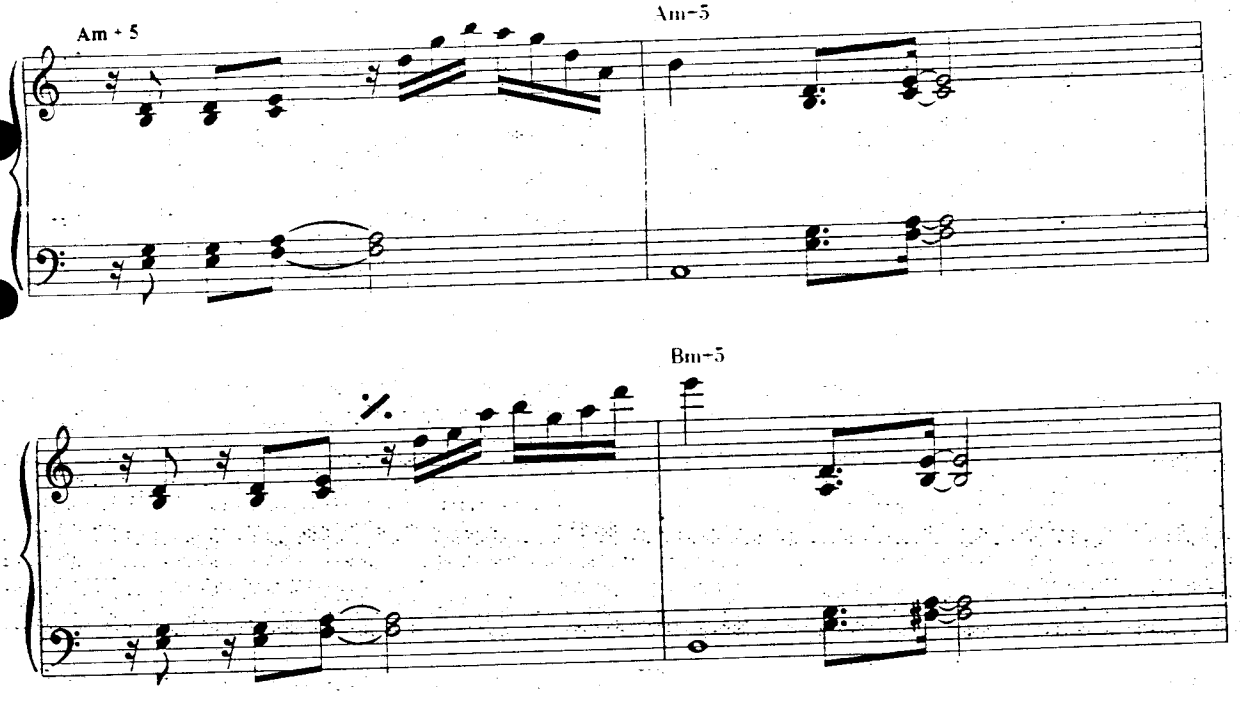

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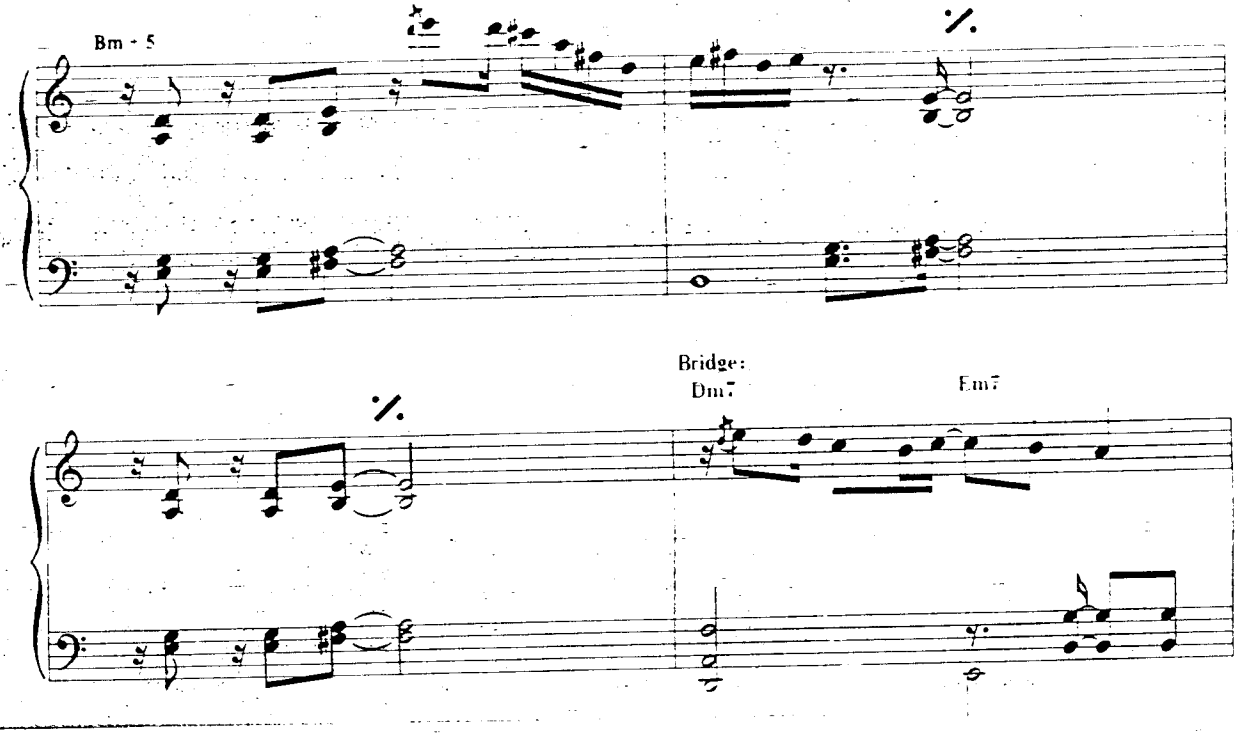

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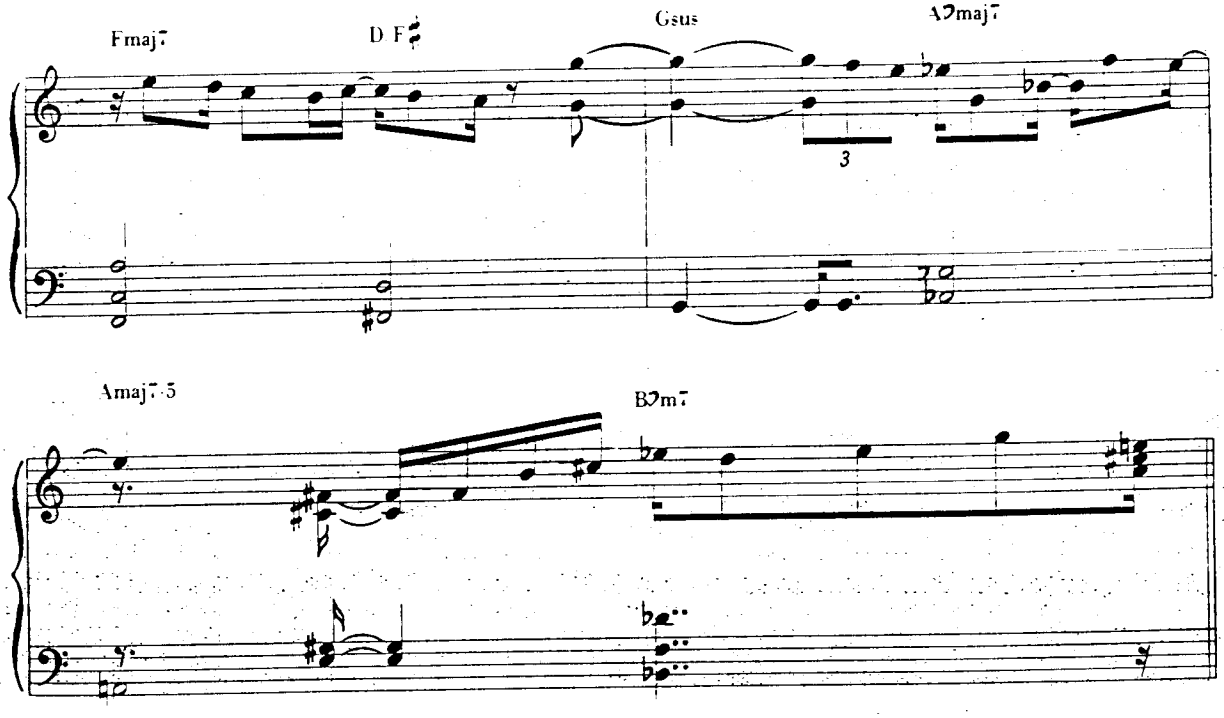

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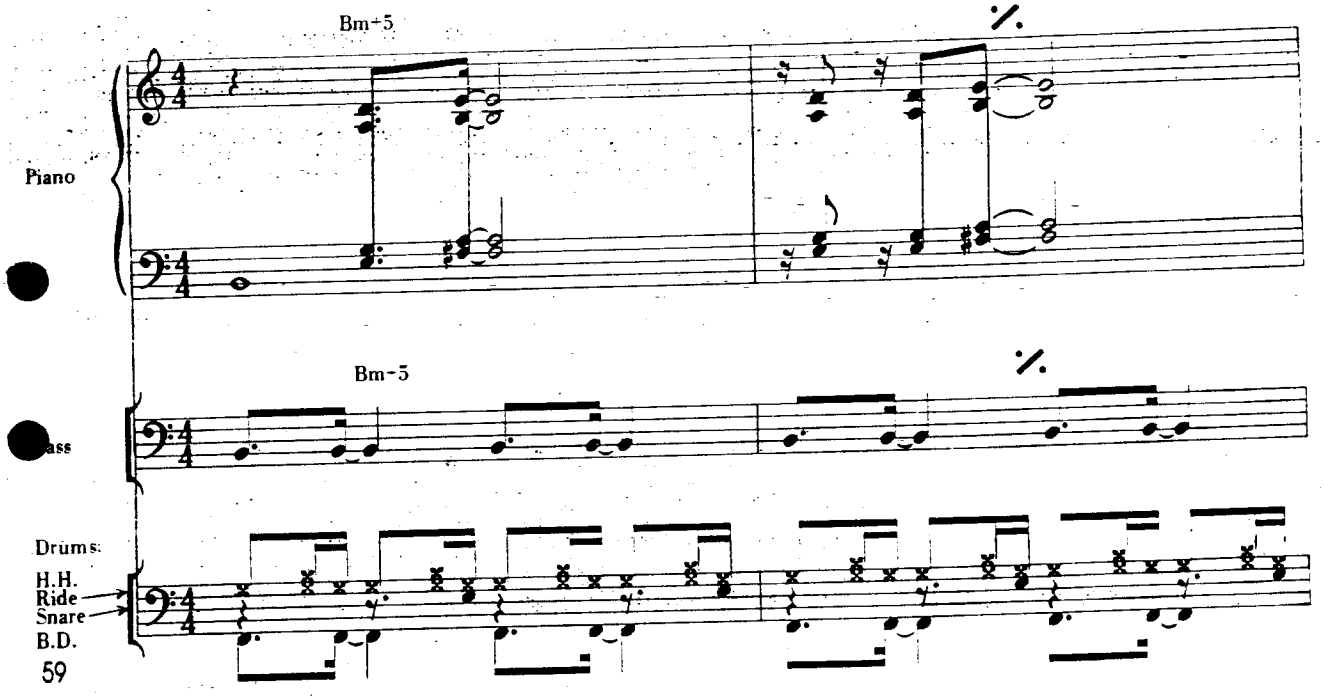
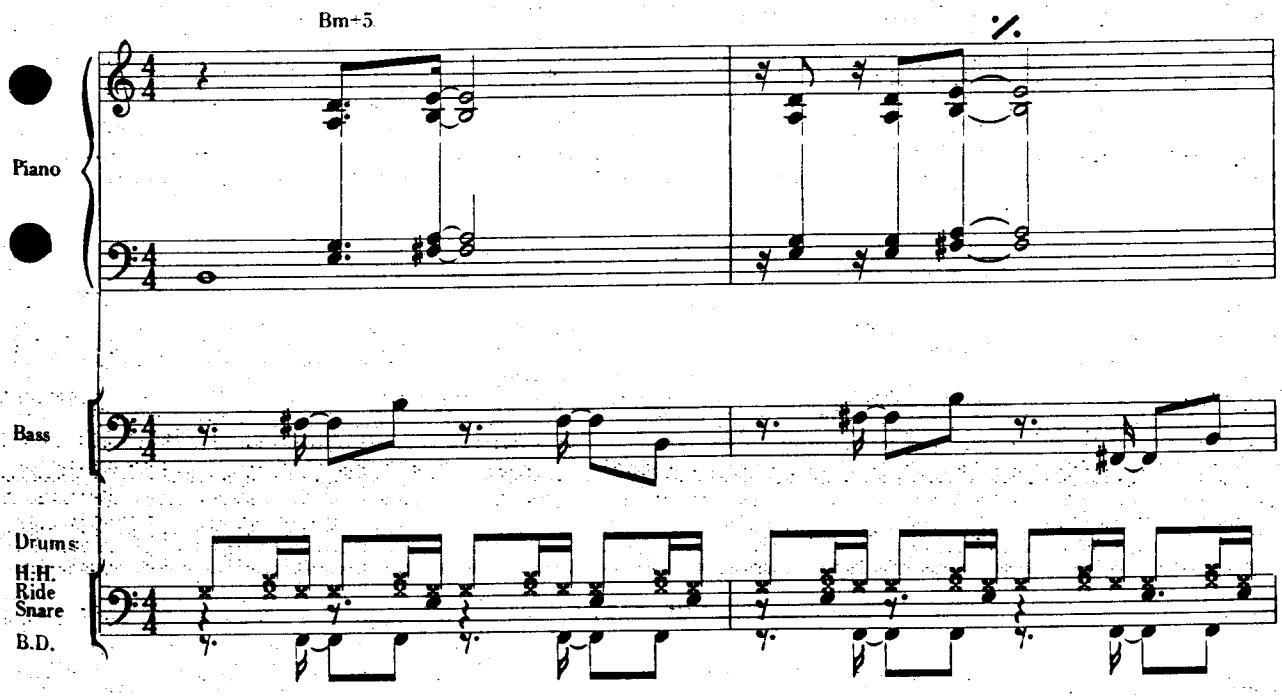
"LONG FALL" REHEARSAL WITH TRIO

Ex. 1A. Balón Rhythm Pattern



Ex. 1B: Alternate Rhythm Pattern



CHEAP BUT GOOD ADVICE FOR PLAYING MUSIC IN A GROUP:

1. Play only what you hear.
2. If you don't hear anything, don't play anything.
3. Don't let your fingers and limbs just wander—place them intentionally.
4. Don't improvise on endlessly—play something with intention, develop it or not, but then end off, take a break.
5. Leave space—create space—intentionally create places where you don't play.
6. Make your sound blend. Listen to your sound and adjust it to the rest of the band and the room.
7. If you play more than one instrument at a time—like a drum kit or multiple keyboards—make sure they are balanced with one another.
8. Don't make any of your music mechanically or just through patterns of habit. Create each sound, phrase, and piece with choice—deliberately.
9. Guide your choice of what to play by what you like—not by what someone else will think.
10. Use contrast and balance the elements
    high-low
    fast-slow
    loud-soft
    tense-relaxed
    dense-sparse
11. Play to make the other musicians sound good. Play things that will make the overall music sound good.
12. Play with a relaxed body. Always release whatever tension you create.
13. Create space—begin, develop and end phrases with intention.
14. Never beat or pound your instrument—play it easily and gracefully.
15. Create space—then place something in it.
16. Use mimicry sparsely—mostly create phrases that contrast with and develop the phrases of the other players.

Music which, in one way or another, helps people get along better in life is the best kind of music.

With my music, I like to share the joy of making music; the spirit of playing. I like music to keep us tuned to our basic freedom to create.

A musician, with music, can add a soothing, sparkling, and joyful influence to the normal stresses and strains of everyday living in this world.

In the "Keyboard Workshop," I've attempted to share a few bits of musical technique and study methods that are a part of my music-making. I hope you find them useful in your own music-making, and encourage you to continue to spread the good effects.

Thanks to: Glenn Mangel, Rob Wallis, Paul Siegel, John Patitucci, Tom Brechtlein, Ron Moss, Sally Hesse, Evelyn Brechtlein, John Novello, and Charlie Giordano, for their help and good work in making this video.

And a special thanks to L. Ron Hubbard, whose work in the fields of Art and Study have been tremendously helpful to me as a musician.

—Chick Corea.