The Barry Harris Method of Piano Harmony

An introduction to the principles of harmonic movement

Before we start, remember:

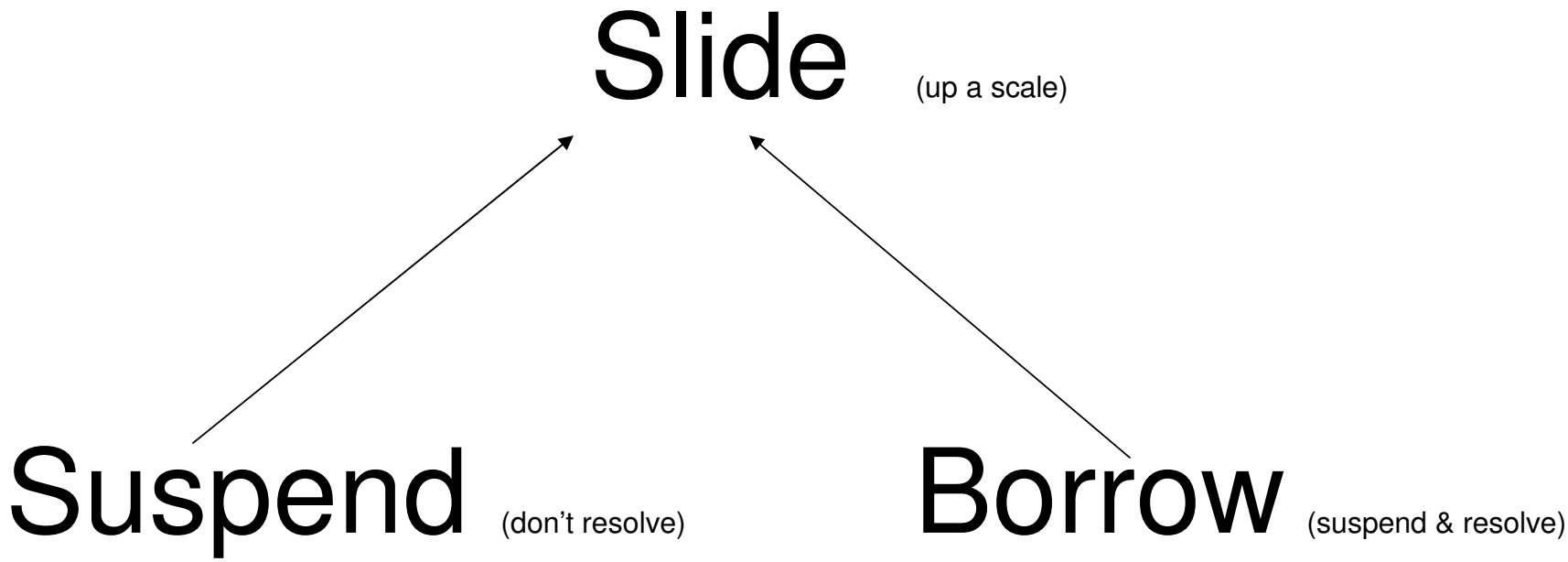
- Building blocks are 4 note chords

  (sometimes there is some doubling)

Then:

Drop (2, 3, 2-4)

Invert (4 times)


Slide
(up a scale)
Suspend
(don’t resolve)
Borrow
(suspend & resolve)

Static Approach

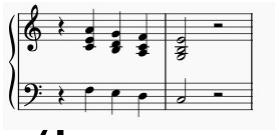
Interpreting a chord symbol at face value

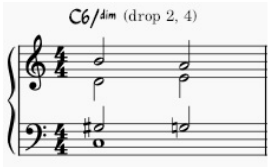
C7 = C - E - G – Bb

- Maybe add extensions, like 9, 13
- Maybe make it a bigger voicing by doubling notes
- Maybe use upper structure triads or chords

Whatever you add or change, <u>it doesn't move</u>

Ways to move a chord

1) Add passing chords (this is called reharmonization).
2) Move between different inversions and voicings of the chord.
3) Slide the chord shape down a mode, till it lands on the chord (sliding). 
4) Add and resolve suspensions (borrowing).
   Suspensions can be diatonic or chromatic, from above or below



The challenge with method 3 (sliding)

- You have to remember a different mode for each chord type.
- Sliding chords can sound very different from the target chord.
- Sliding only works in very specific. situations (for ex., major 7 and minor 7)
- You cannot apply this technique indiscriminately.

The challenge with method 4 (borrowing)

- Suspensions may change the character of the chord, and even the quality (for example, a major 6 becomes minor 6).

- Suspensions work best with specific chord tones and in certain directions.

(2-1, 2-3, 4-3, #4-5, 6-5, 7-6)

Barry's system simplifies all four methods for moving a chord

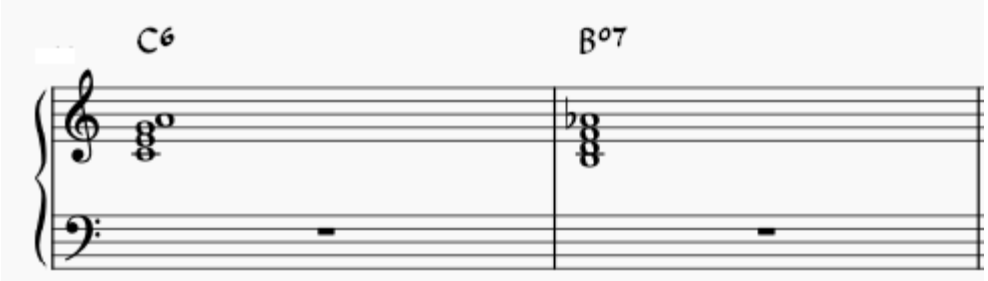
- Only two scales need to be learned.
  (no modes need to be learned)
- Sliding chords always work with target chord.
- All notes can be suspended, indiscriminately. (all notes, all directions)

Preparatory exercises

- Practice moving a 4 note chord up a major scale. 
- Practice moving a 4 note chord up a melodic minor scale. 
- Add the suspensions to each chord and resolve: for example, a chromatic note below the root. 

The magic scale: The sixth diminished scale

- By adding a #5 to a major scale you get a major 6 diminished scale.
- It is the sum of two chords: a major 6 chord and a dim 7 chord.



- By adding a #5 to a melodic minor scale, you get a minor 6 diminished scale.
- It is the sum of two chords: a minor 6 chord and a dim 7 chord.

- All chords (major 6, minor 6, minor 7, half diminished, dominant, altered dominant, diminished) are associated with one of these two scales.

- In Barry's system you only have to practice these 2 scales!

What’s the challenge?

- You have to practice each scale in 12 keys.
- You have to associate every chord in a song with the appropriate 6/dim scale.
- The movements inside the 6/dim scales are tricky. You have to practice them all ahead of time. First in C, then in all the other 11 keys.

Therefore…

- Barry's method requires lateral thinking (which can be confusing).

  For example:

  C7 = Gm6
  C7 = Dbm6
  C major 7 = G major 6
  Dm7 = F6
  Dm7b5 = Fm6

- This is similar to thinking of upper structure triads, BUT…

  …you think of upper structure scales, NOT chords!

  C7 = G minor 6 diminished scale
  C7 = Db minor 6 diminished scale

  C major 7 = G major 6 diminished scale
  Dm7 = F major 6 diminished scale
  Dm7b5 = F minor 6 diminished scale

Furthermore…

Everything must move on the ‘upper structure’ 6 diminished scales.

The best way to start is to practice the C 6 diminished scale:

C D E F G G# A B

Next, play a C major 6 chord:

C major 6 = C E G A

Make the C6 chord move.

Two ways:

1. Slide the chord up and down the scale.

2. Add suspensions (using only scale notes), and resolve them…(it's called borrowing).
   …from above, from below, in singles, in pairs, in triplets…  

Things to notice about this scale:

- It's an 8 note scale (which has 4 + 4 symmetry).
- A major (or minor) 6 chord always alternates with a diminished 7 chord.
- Any note can be suspended, provided it's inside the scale.

Advantages?

- The practice routine is almost exclusively on these two scales.
- Endless combinations can be developed.
- Suspensions are easy to identify.
- Sliding chords up and down the 6/dim scale sounds like the alternation of Tonic – Dominant, so it works anywhere in the scale.
- Best results are with simple 4 notes chords (which are invertible).

Practicing is crucial

- The practice routine encodes your muscle memory with movements.
- When you see a chord, you play a movement. No rational thinking involved.
- The thinking, fingering, articulation etc. are all practiced ahead of performing a song.

Developing a practice routine

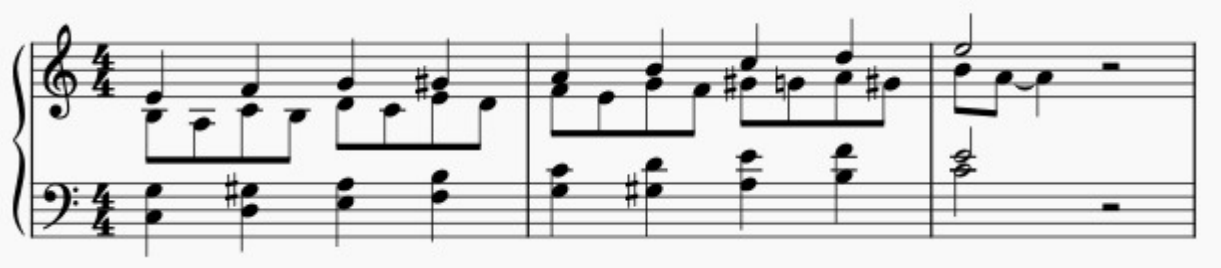
- Choose a major 6 chord (4 notes).
- Open it up by dropping the alto note an octave. (drop 2)
- Move it up its 6/dim scale.
- Apply one suspension to the soprano, alto, tenor and bass in turn (both from above and below).

Barry's exercises

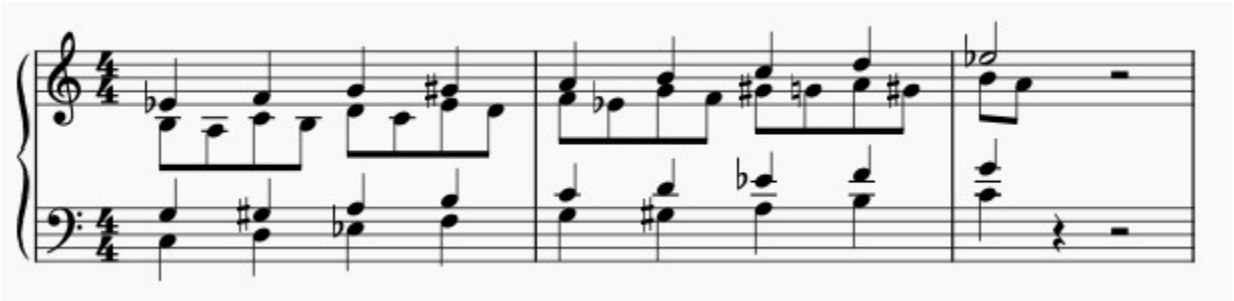
- Over the years, Barry has developed hundreds of elegant exercises that can be used effectively in any performance.

  Following are some examples on the main chord categories:

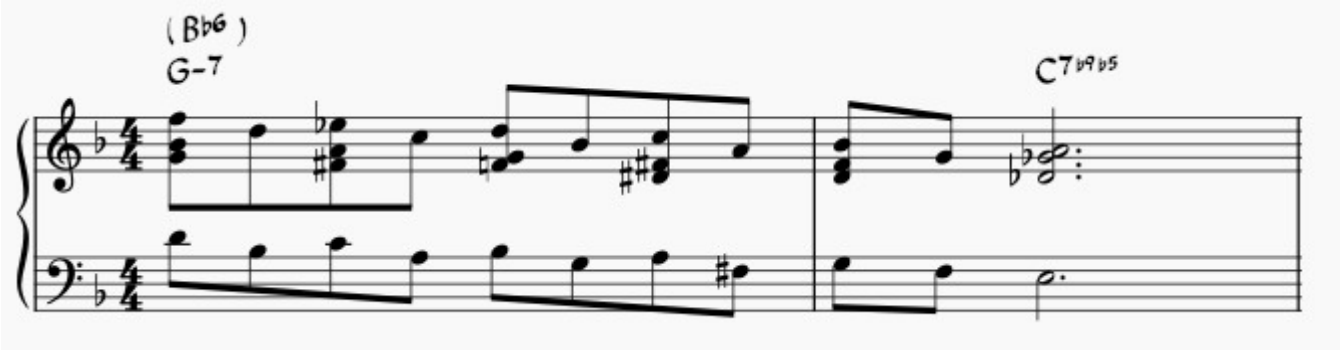
Major 6



Minor 6

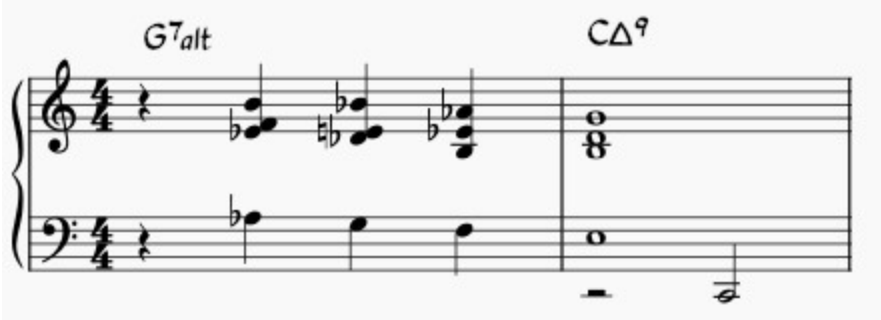


Minor 7

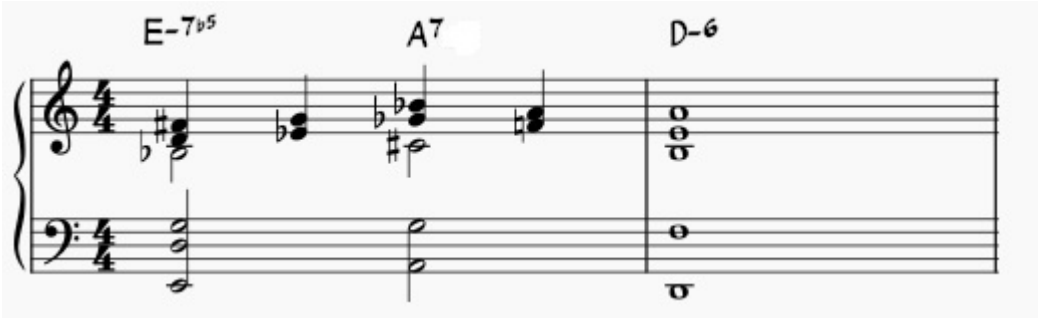


Dominant 7

- G7 = Abm6/dim
  C Maj 9 = G6



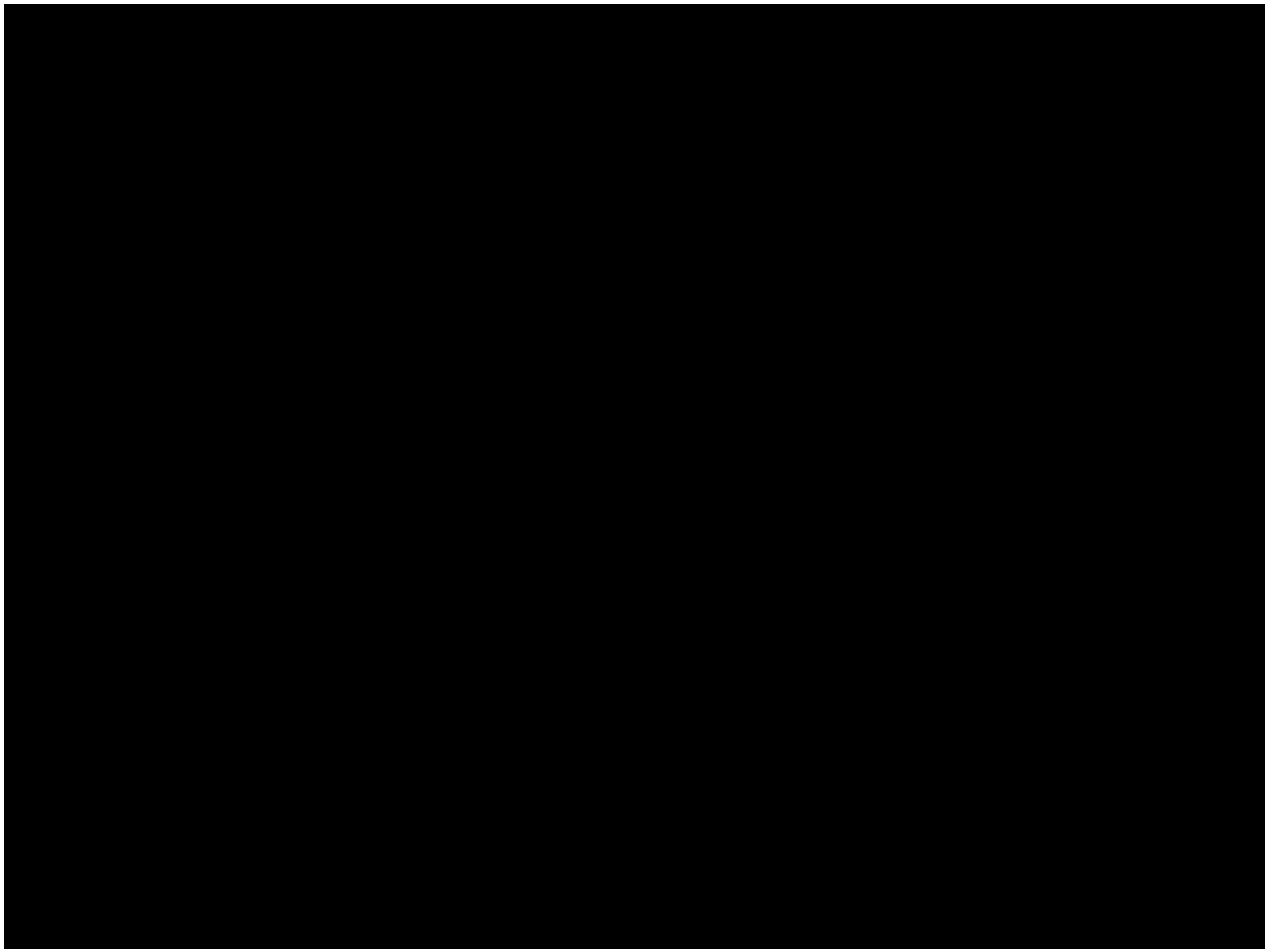
Minor 7 b5



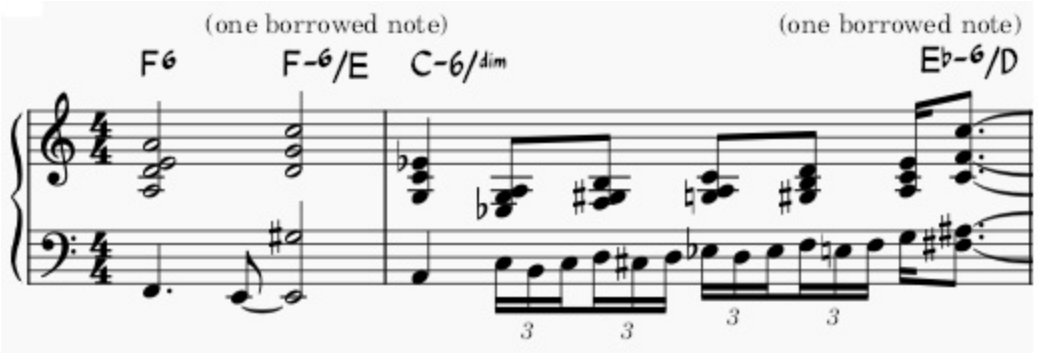
Em7b5 = G-6 (G A Bb C D Eb E F#)

A7 = Bb-6 (Bb C Db Eb F Gb G A)

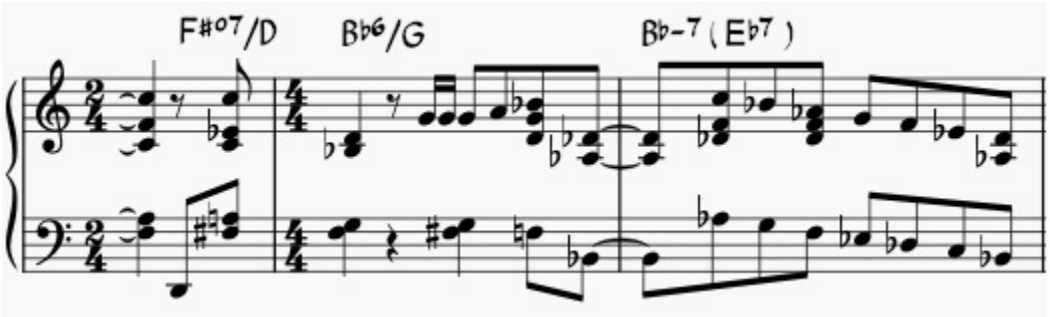
Barry illustrates:



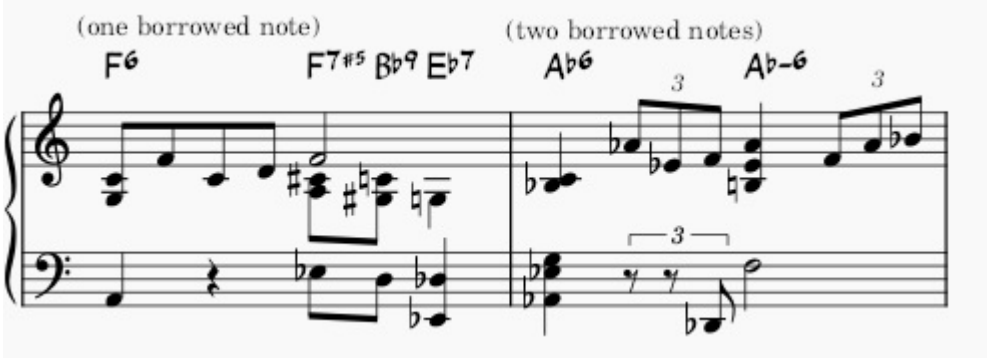
Part 1



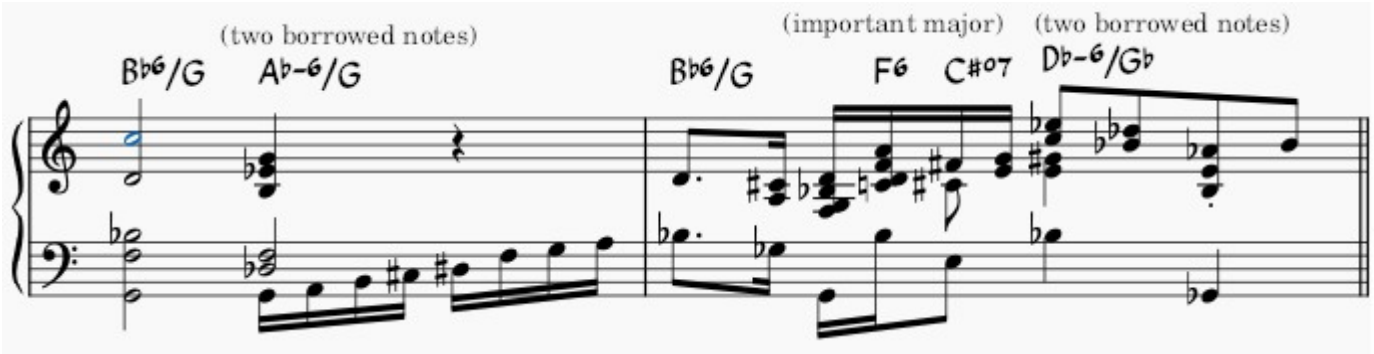
Part 2



Part 3


(one borrowed note)
(two borrowed notes)
F6
F7#5
Bb9
Eb7
Ab6
Ab-6
3
3
3

Part 4


(two borrowed notes)
(important major)
(two borrowed notes)
B♭6/G
A♭-6/G
B♭6/G
F6
C♯07
D♭-6/G♭

- Thank you for attending!