the monotony

by Jason Klobnak

BREAKING
the monotony

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INTRODUCTION

From the *Jazz Corner* article in the October 2006 *International Trumpet Guild Journal* written by Jason Klobnak (This material was originally published in the *International Trumpet Guild Journal* and is included here with the knowledge and permission of that organization. For more information about the International Trumpet Guild please visit their web site: www.trumpetguild.org):

> "Of the many sources, methods and "how-to" books on jazz improvisation, relatively few address rhythmic development. This is often *the* integral element that will further enhance the improvisation level of students seeking a "spark" to ignite their playing. Lacking this element, many students find themselves monotonously playing the same ideas in their solos. To overcome this, *rhythmic vitality* is needed.
>
> Rhythmic vitality, the underlying current of jazz, goes deeper than just the initial pulse. Jazz musicians often find themselves in ruts at one point or another in their improvisational journey. Rhythmic vitality is part of the most intriguing improvisations and can provide the initial thrust that makes a great solo. In a typical intermediate to advanced jazz solo, a large part of the solo will be a string of eighth notes, often dubbed as "typewriter" or "machine gun" soloing. Beginner to intermediate improvisers *should* strive to be able to connect their lines and practice with strings of eighth notes to promote linear continuity and pulse. However, this point of development is where many improvisers remain."

The information presented in *Breaking the Monotony* is what I have found to work for not only myself, but for my students, colleagues and ultimately for you. This book will unveil some of the different ways we can energize our improvisations with rhythmic and conceptual ideas to 'break the monotony' of the continuous eighth-note line. Each chapter will unveil simple concepts that can influence your ideas to help you create a more effective and meaningful improvisation.

ESSENTIAL TOOLS

No matter what stage of development in your musical journey, everybody has to have essential tools or skills necessary to communicate effectively. Beyond knowing how to play your instrument, it is important for you to know your major, minor and chromatic scales in all keys. It is also important to have a basic understanding of harmony and how chords are built. These are the foundational building blocks to music. For this book, it is also imperative that you are able to read music and interpret written rhythms and notes. There are many great resources available today that deal strictly with scales, harmony and how to read/write music. Once you have these very basic tools, you can gain the maximum benefit from this book.

For more information on how some of the melodic lines are structured throughout this book, I would also suggest you check out my book *Targeting: Improvisation With Purpose* which shows some of the many different ways we can creatively target notes to help create a more meaningful improvisation. You can buy it in print or a digital versions at www.jasonklobnak.com.

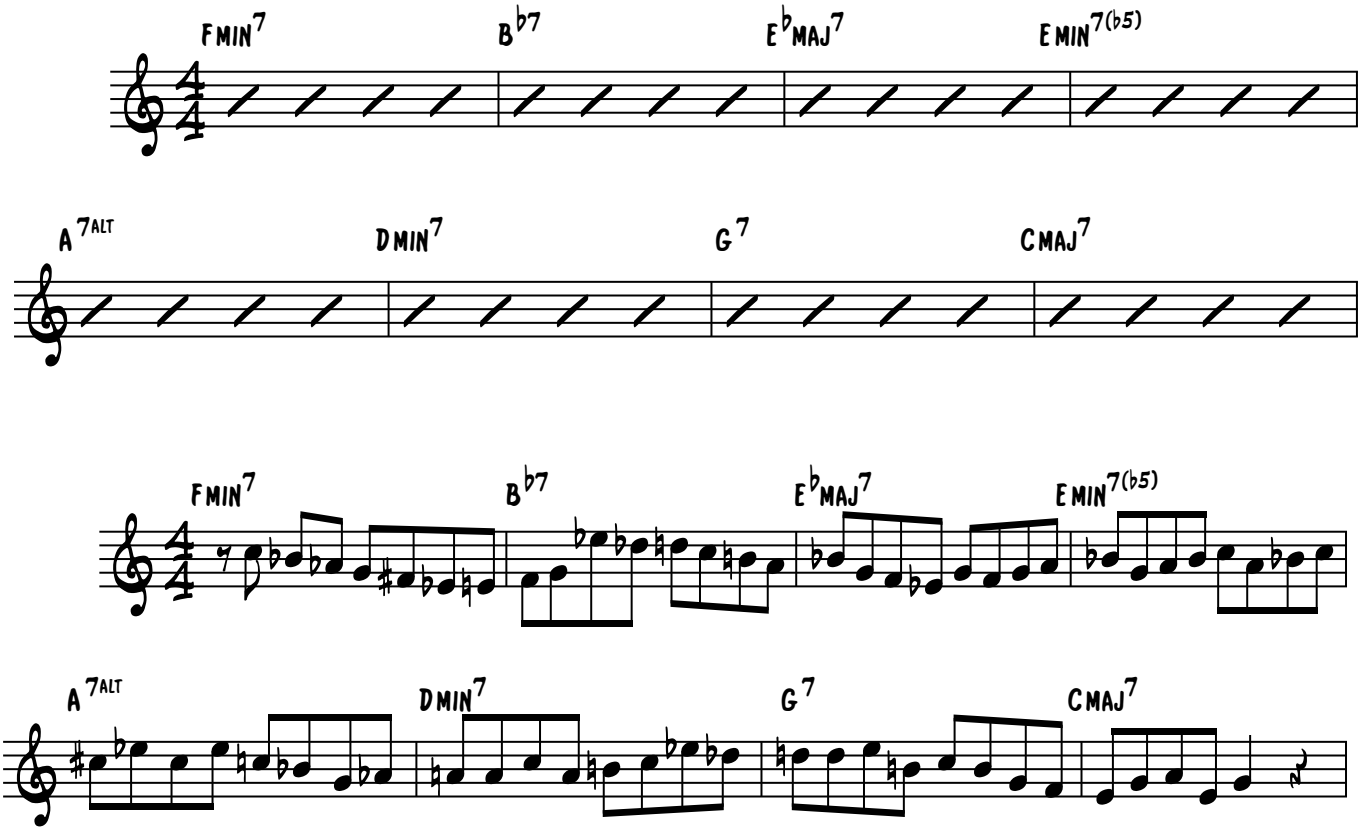
INDEPENDENCE IN IMPROVISATION & PERSONALIZING ARTICULATION

Independence in improvisation could have a few different definitions, but the one that I am applying refers to the ability to improvise effectively with *no accompaniment*. I had the honor to sit down and talk with jazz trumpeter, Ron Miles. We talked a lot about melodic considerations while improvising, but the topic that dominated the majority of our discussion was the ability to improvise when no one else is around (or when the rhythm section drops out for a chorus). This not only works on your time, but also makes you focus on the melody and chord changes on a deeper level.

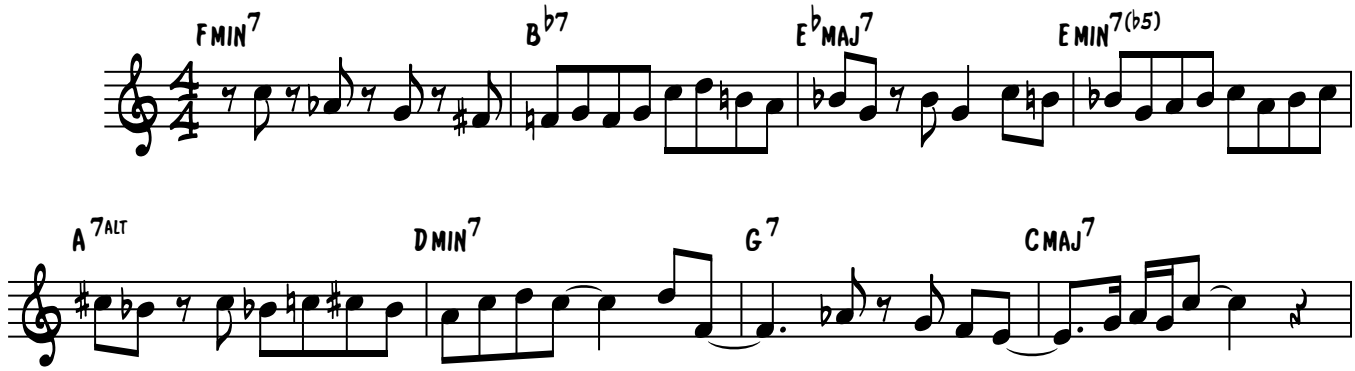
In our modern age of technology, we have become very dependent on our digital "rhythm sections." Don't get me wrong, I *LOVE* using Aebersold® play-along's, Band-in-A-Box® and my current favorite…iReal Book® for the iPhone®. As a matter of fact, I use them on a regular basis. However, if we are not careful we can become dependent on having something else feed us the chord changes and keep time for us. It can cause our improvisations to become reactive instead of proactive. When we are playing on the bandstand, we are playing with other musicians who are making music with us. If we have spent all of our time with a digital rhythm section, it becomes more difficult to interact with the REAL musicians on stage.

The more time we spend working on a song independently, the more freedom we have with that song. It has become so ingrained that we don't have to think about it on the bandstand and our focus can move from what *I am* playing to what *we are* playing. This creates a much more exciting improvisation that communicates with an audience.

As an exercise, take the progression below and improvise over it with *no backing track* of any kind (if you need help keeping time, use a metronome). For your first pass, try to keep a continuous flow of eighth notes to work on your connection of the targets in the progression.



For your second pass, break up the continuous eighth note line- but be sure to keep good time. Each successive pass there should be more syncopation and rests while keeping your time consistent.



If this is your first time utilizing this concept, it will probably be a little difficult the first couple of attempts. Keep at it because this will pay great dividends the more you work on it. After a while, when you play with a rhythm section you will feel a new level of confidence and a sense of freedom to interact with those around you. This should become a regular part of your practice routine. I would suggest you work on this concept at least once a week.

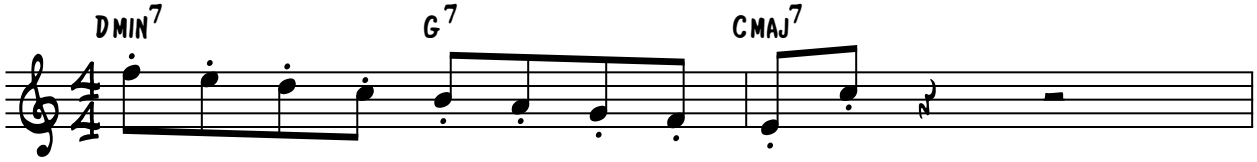
PERSONALIZING ARTICULATION

If you were given a blind listening test of 4 or 5 famous artists that played your instrument- most of you would be able to identify each artist. There are a number of factors that would help you make that determination: tone, melodic/rhythmic ideas, articulation, etc. The factor we are going to talk about is *articulation*. I believe each person has an articulation that is slightly different from someone else (much like fingerprints) that plays the same instrument. Some can sound very close to the other, but not *quite* the same. The beautiful part about it is that it is personalized to each individual. We have our own likes and dislikes.

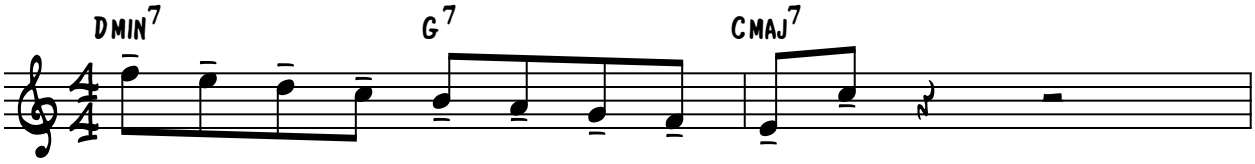
You may be wondering, “Great, Jason. How does this help me break the monotony with my improvisations?” A simple change in articulation can influence your rhythmic choices and how you approach your improvised line. If you elongated one legato note longer then you normally would, it might take you in a different creative direction within your improvisation. The same could be true for the length (or lack thereof) of your staccato. Some people never develop their articulation until it is personalized. We listen to our favorite artists and try to match their articulations and nuances, but rarely do we go past what someone else did and make it ***our own***. When we develop our style, our improvisations communicate to our audiences on a deeper level. You are showing your own style and not an imitation of someone else.

As you can imagine, there are varying degrees of each articulation. How short is your staccato? How long is your legato? If I put two people in a room and told them to play a staccato “F”- each person’s interpretation would be different. That is a part of what makes us individuals. When working on personalizing your articulation style, I like to have students start at the extreme end of an articulation and move towards the other end of the spectrum. As you move from one end of the spectrum to the other, you will find that one of those passes will sound the best to your ears.

The example below is a very simple line at one end of the extreme (in this case- VERY short and separated).



The other end of the spectrum would be the same line but with a very long legato with little separation like the example below.



These examples help us find our articulation in one style (i.e. how we like our staccatos, legatos, etc.). Since you have worked that line from the two extremes… now you can combine different degrees of those articulations to the same line and give it a completely different flavor. That does not mean that all of our articulations in our improvisations have to be all in that “middle ground.” The example below is the same line from the two above, but with a mixture of varying degrees of articulations.

Use your ear as the determining factor. Some mixtures will have a great sound. Others will not. But, this is a part of finding your personalized style of articulation that you use for your improvisations. Your articulations help define who you are as a musician. Spend time working on different articulations to the lines you are working on (as well as those found in this book) and determine which one fits you the best. Let your ear guide you and determine what you like and use it.

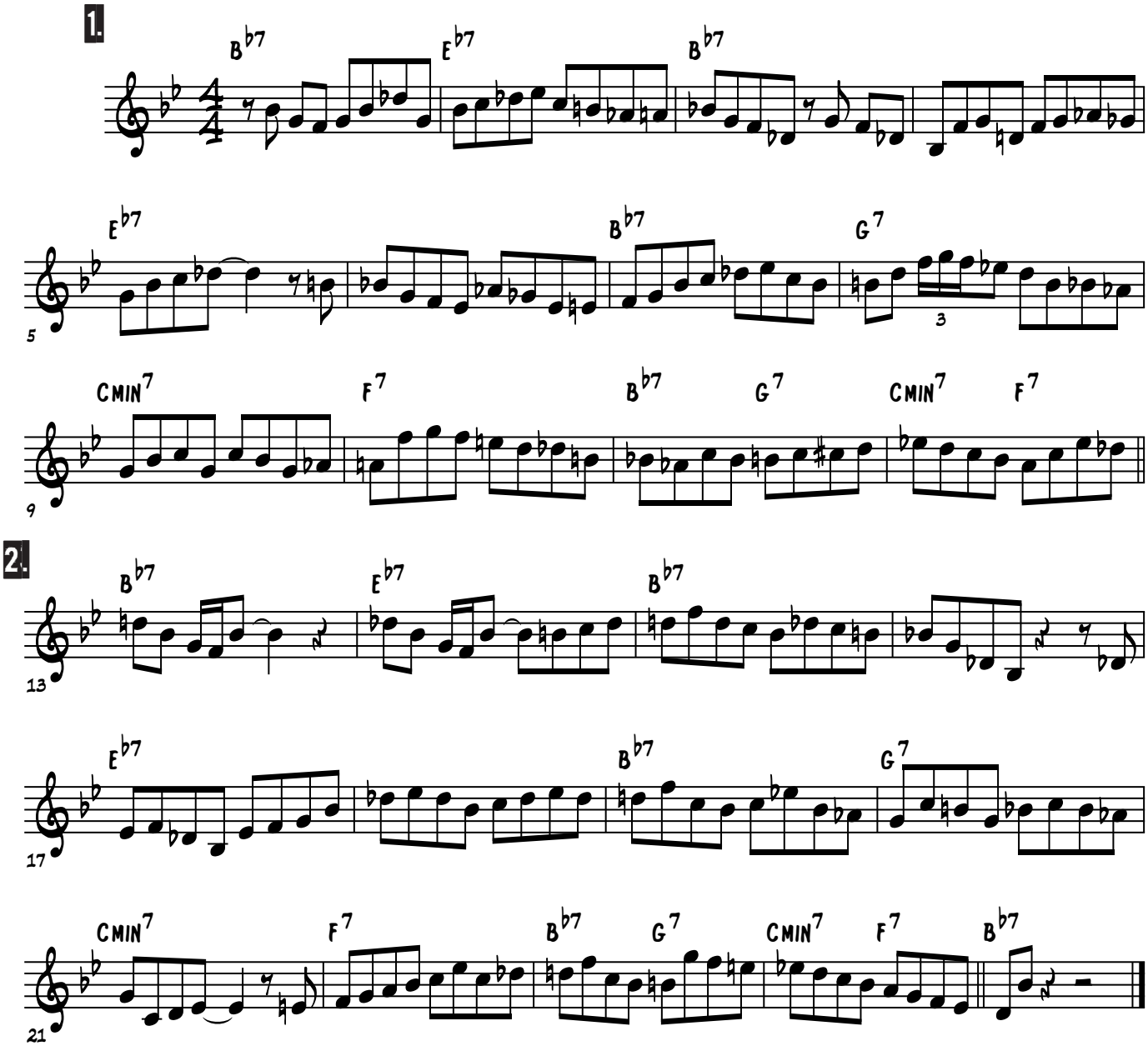
LET IT BREATHE

Sometimes in our pursuit for finding our voice or that perfect line, we as musicians tend to say *too much*. You hear it a lot at college campuses and at jam sessions. Musicians throw in every thought, lick, line, motif and the kitchen sink into one improvisation. It is great to have stuff to say, however, in our attempt to sound mature we string line after line without leaving space for the improvisation to *breathe*. Those that play wind instruments (trumpet, sax, trombone, etc.) at least have to breathe at some point, but those should not be the only places that the improvisation has space. Some of the best musical examples (improvised or written) I can think of have a nice balance of notes AND rests. We have to remember as improvisers that everything we play and *do not* play is a part of our improvisation. That space matters and it allows our whole improvisation to breathe.

Our improvisations are not one-way conversations. You make a statement (a sentence), *pause* for reaction from either the audience or rhythm section and then make another statement. Unless you are doing a solo gig, you are not the only one playing on the stage! There may be times where you are dominating the conversation since you are the soloist at that given moment in time, but allow others to contribute to the conversation. Everything that happens within an improvisation (solo) is a part of that improvisation. What the rhythm section plays in your space gives you options on where you could go. If we think of making statements and pausing (or waiting for reaction) before making another statement, we allow the music to breathe and create a more organic improvisation that goes beyond our practice routine of playing with backing tracks.

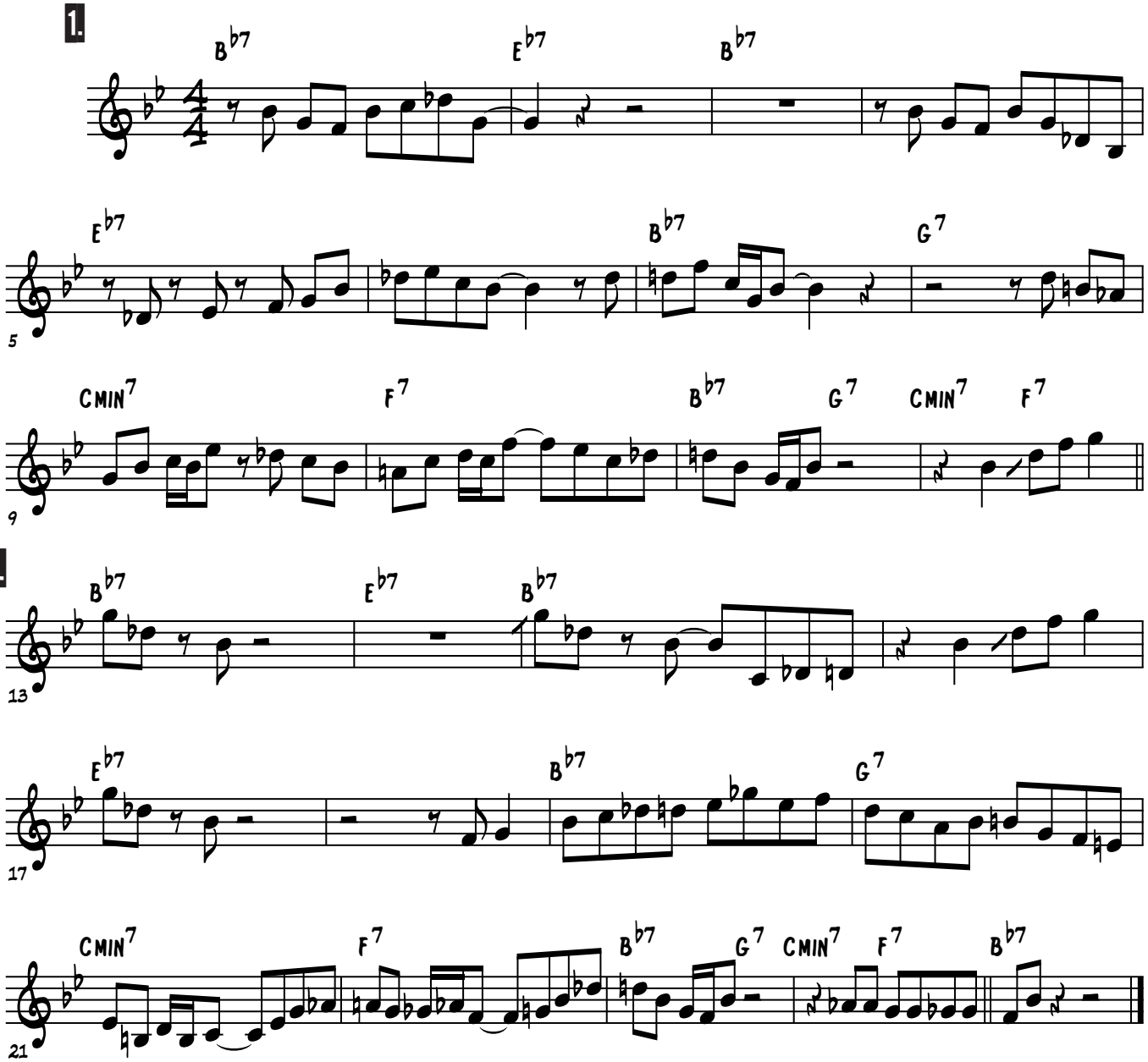
A great way to show this concept is by comparing the two examples on the next page. Both examples are over a standard Bb-Blues progression, which can be commonplace on the bandstand at a jam session.

The first example is what I would consider to be something that was busy. If you notice, it looks like an etude found in a jazz pattern book. Depending on the tempo being played, this would give a wind player (trumpet, sax, bone, etc.) quite a workout because there are very few places to physically breathe. If the improviser was constantly fighting for air, should not the audience's ears take a break every now and then too?



The second example shows more spatial balance. You can almost imagine what the rhythm section might be playing in the spaces the improviser was not.

Personally, I would rather hear an improvisation that breathed a little and had interaction from everyone in the band, over hearing a soloist play non-stop as if they were the only one present. I am not saying that busy is bad (there is an appropriate time for it), but not ALL the time. Let the music breathe every once in a while and let the interaction between you and the rhythm section take you in a new direction. You will be surprised at what might happen!



NOTES

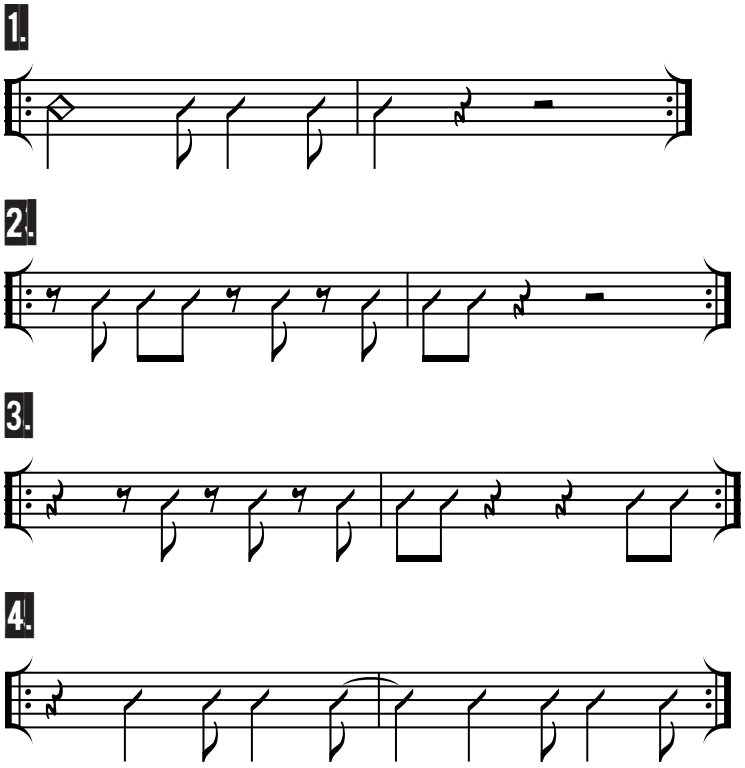
INFLUENCE OF SYNCOPATION

Syncopation is a shift in accent from strong beats to weak beats that can be temporary or over a larger span of rhythmic space. When you hear the term jazz rhythm…the first word that should pop into your mind should be syncopation. Jazz is FULL of syncopation. It is what gives the music its forward movement, vitality and bounce.

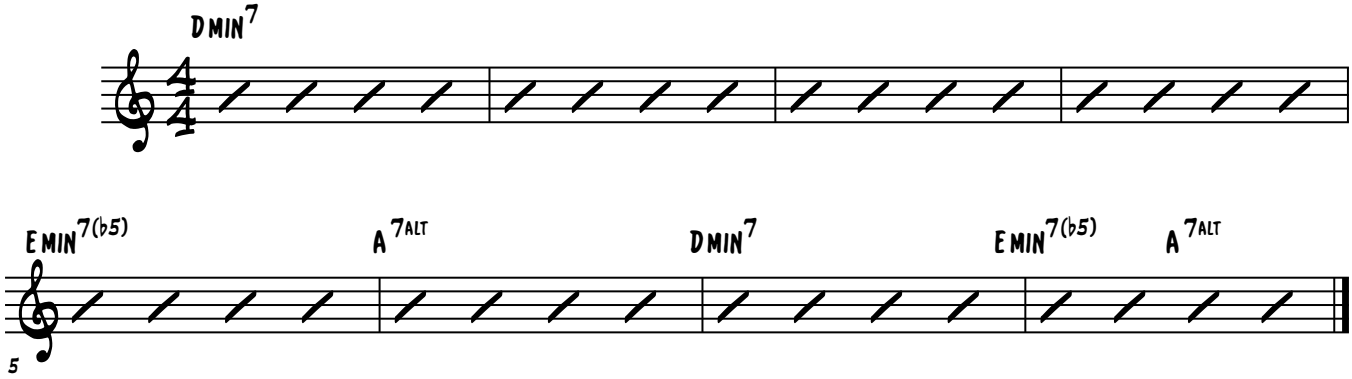
When I hear someone improvise, I want to hear more than just a string of eighth notes. Continuous eighth note lines are important and every musician should be able to do them. However, they are not the end-all and we should strive to find a balance between them and syncopation to keep interest.

If you look at a lot of the bebop heads that were written, very few of them were quarter notes and half notes (like many of the American Songbook standards). They were full of syncopated rhythms (i.e. Confirmation, Au Privave, etc.). We want to take advantage of those syncopated rhythms and use them when improvising. It has been said that a number of jazz musicians use the concept of “filling their head with rhythm” and I believe that means they let syncopated ideas influence their lines.

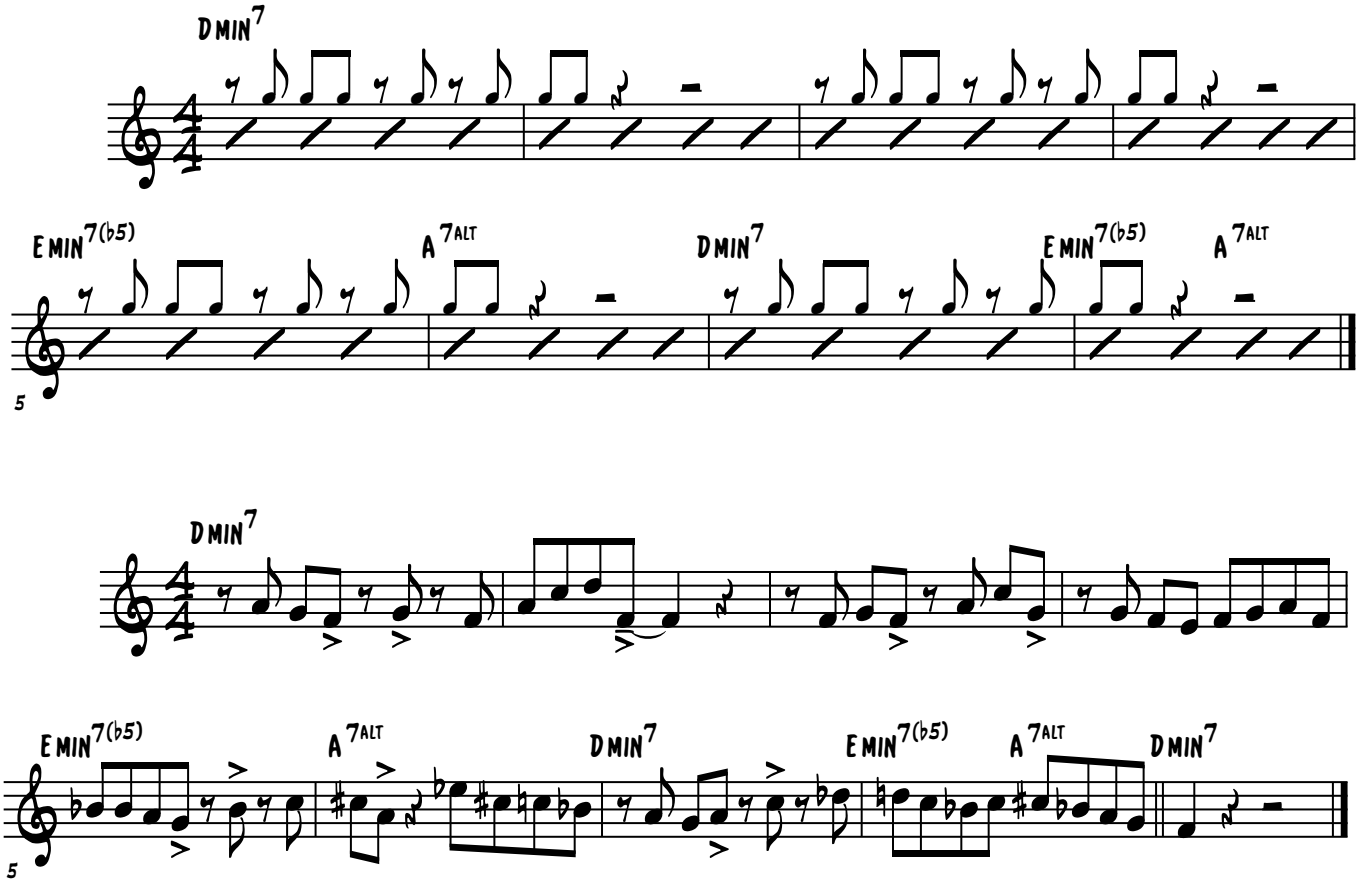
For an exercise, we are going to take the simple changes below and forget about what you would do harmonically for a moment. We are going to fill our head with syncopation and let them influence our lines and articulations. Below are four written examples of syncopated rhythms.

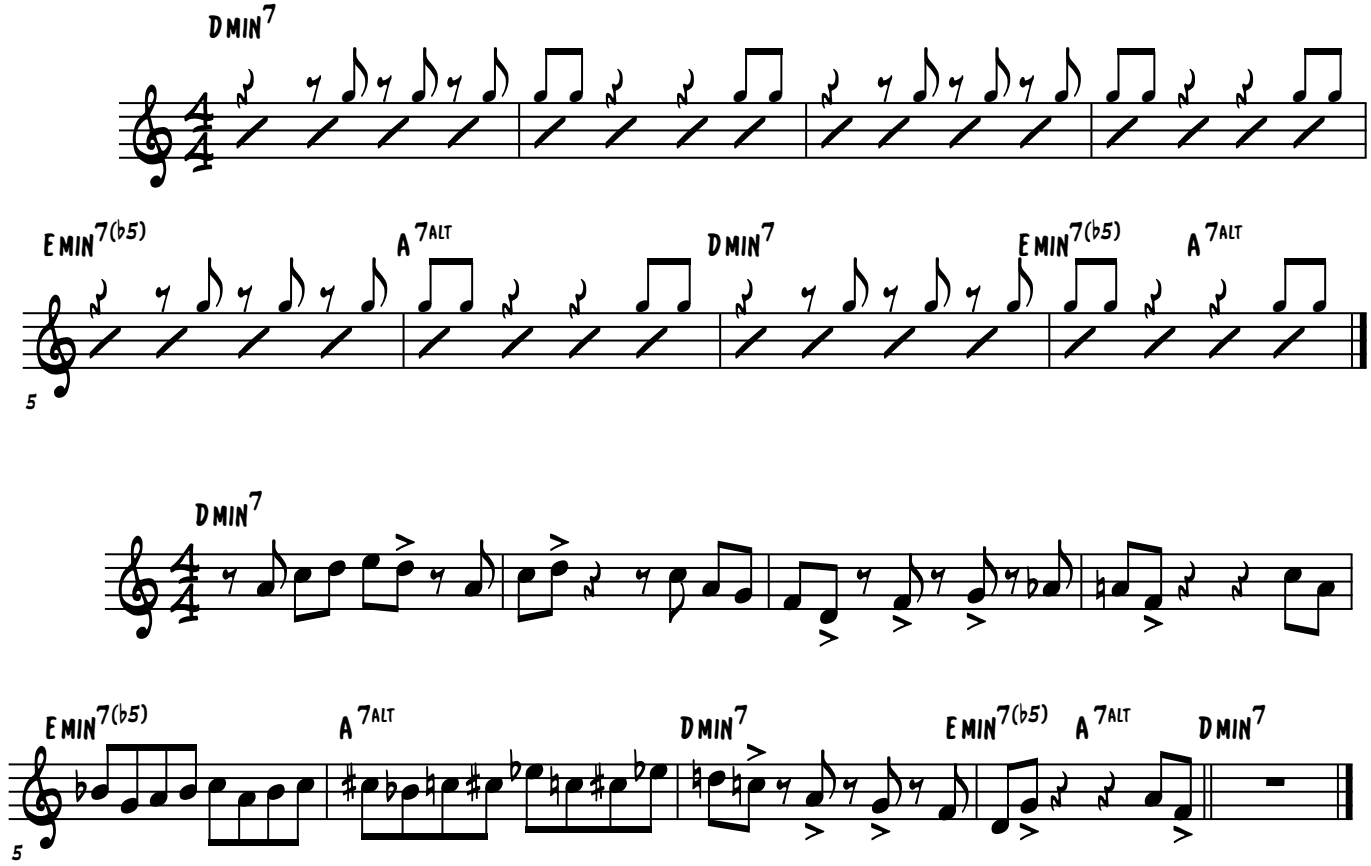


Keep one of the syncopated rhythms flowing in your mind on a loop and then start to improvise over the chord changes below. You are not looking to match notes with the rhythm per se, but let the rhythm influence what you are going to play. For the first couple of times you might revert back to harmonic thinking (which means you stopped thinking about the syncopated rhythm) or your lines might sound awkward and do not resolve in a logical manner. Do not worry this is just an exercise. Over time the syncopated rhythms and your melodic sense will start working together. Take the loop off of the syncopated patterns and combine them. Your lines will mature, make sense and they will SWING.



The last two sets of examples have one of the syncopated rhythms written above the chord changes. Sing the syncopation and memorize that feel. Then play the written example while feeling that syncopation in your mind. Notice how the line bounces off of the influence of the syncopation? This feeling is something you can achieve on a regular basis with consistent practice of filling your head with syncopation and letting it influence your ideas.




D MIN7
E MIN7(b5)
A 7ALT
D MIN7
E MIN7(b5)
A 7ALT
5
D MIN7
E MIN7(b5)
A 7ALT
D MIN7
E MIN7(b5)
A 7ALT
D MIN7
5

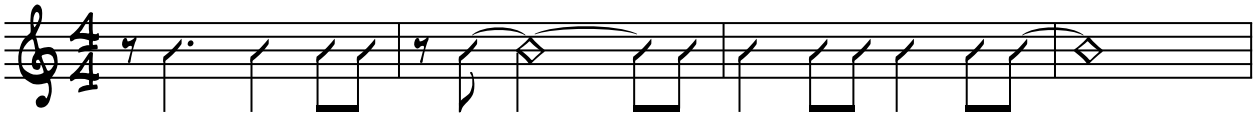
CHAPTER 4

RHYTHMIC QUOTING

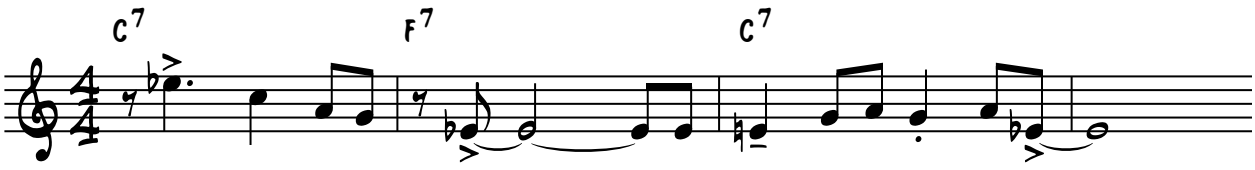
Before we talk about rhythmic quoting, let's talk briefly about what quoting is for those you that may not know. Many of our favorite improvisers will often times "quote" familiar melodies within their solos. Those melodies fit within the chord changes of the moment, but may not necessarily be the song they are playing. These melodies often come from cartoons, lullaby's/children's songs, classical music or other jazz standards. As long as it is a recognizable melody… listeners will notice.

We can take the same concept of melodic quoting and apply it to rhythms. There are many sources of songs that have interesting rhythms (bebop heads, big band charts, Latin charts, Pop/R&B charts, etc.). If we remove the melody and keep the rhythm, we can use that rhythm as a source for ideas to influence our improvisation. The listener may not be able to recognize the rhythm you are playing, but it is a great way to vary up the solo from running eighth note lines.

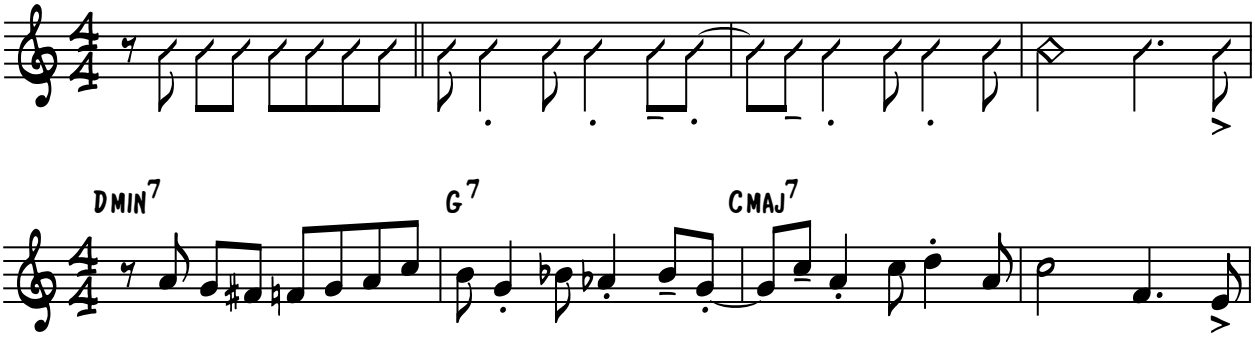
Let's take a few bars of some recognizable standards and apply them. The first example is the rhythm to the first four bars of the jazz standard, *Solar*:



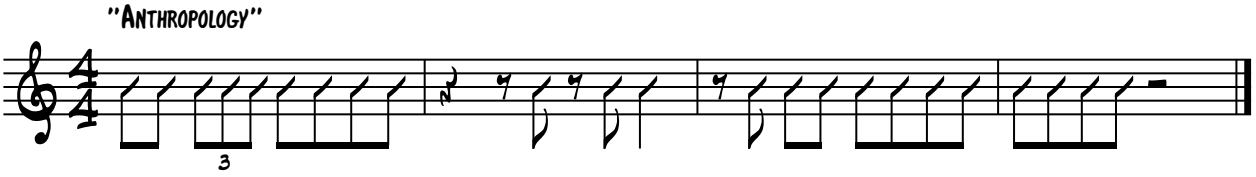
The next example is taking the first four bars of a blues and using the rhythm of *Solar*:

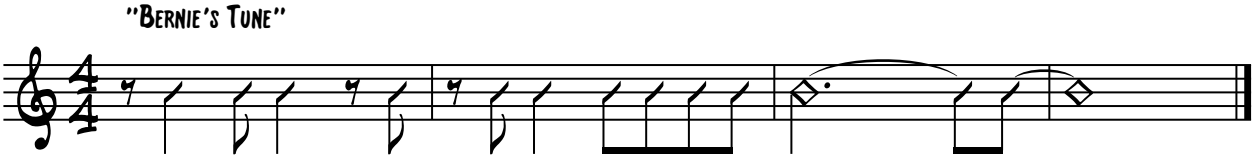


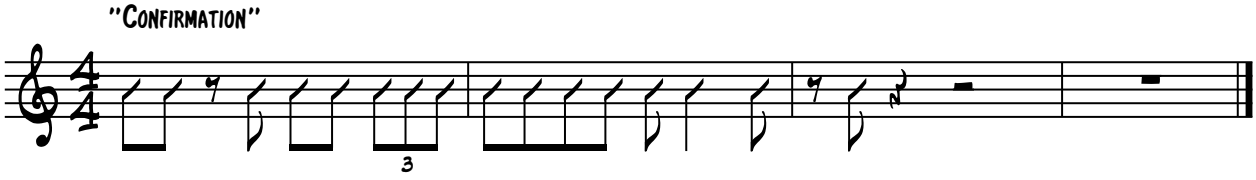
Let's take another recognizable jazz standard, *Pent-Up House* and use the same process. The first example is the rhythm from *Pent-Up House* that we are going to use followed by the musical example.



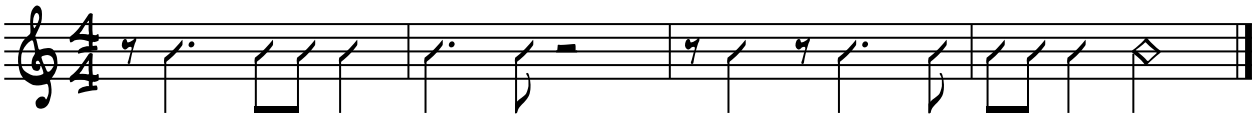
Below are a number of different rhythmic quotes that you can use to spur some rhythmic creativity into your improvisation. These are obviously not all of the possibilities to choose from, but these should get you moving in the right direction. The examples are all useful for tunes that are in a 4/4 time. You can apply this concept to other meters and styles as well. I keep a notebook (which is now all in electronic format) of rhythms and rhythmic quotes I like to keep and refer back to every now and then. I have personal favorites and then I will rotate others into my arsenal depending on the playing situation. Some of the examples below are used in the etudes in the back of this book.



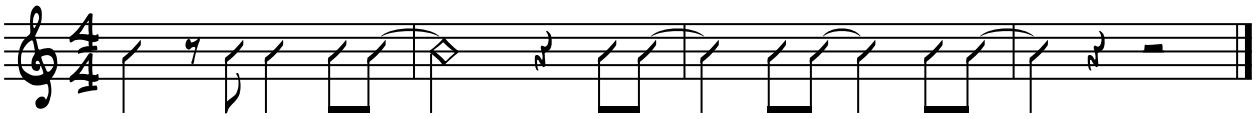




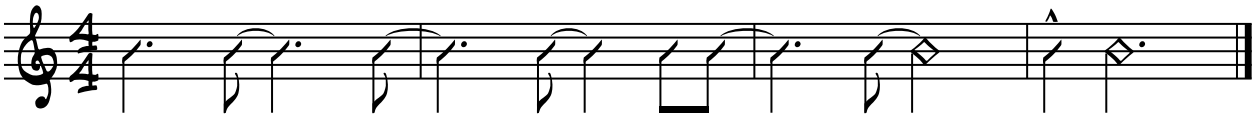
"Cottontail"



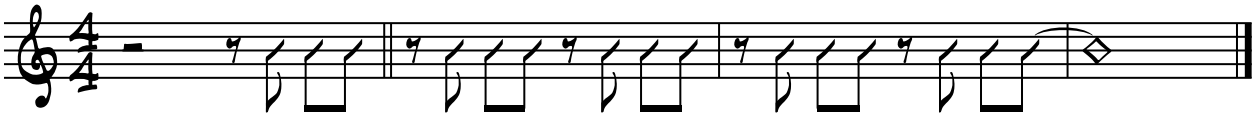
"Dear Old Stockholm"



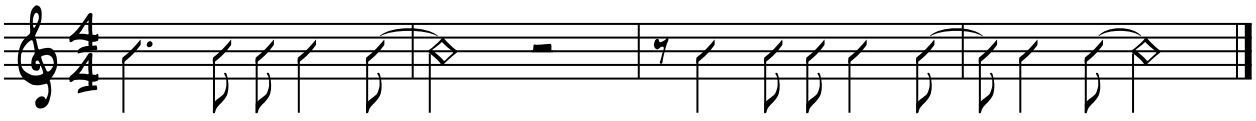
"E.S.P."



"Four"

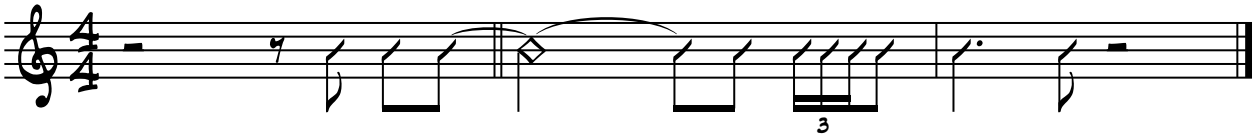


"Have You Met Miss Jones"



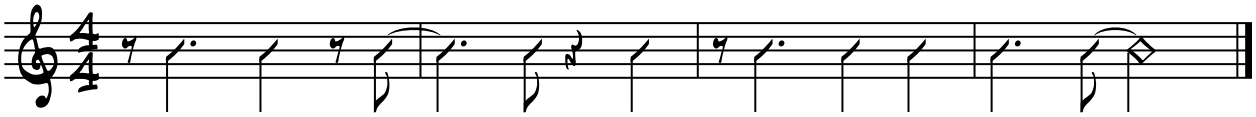
"Jeannine"

"Joy Spring"

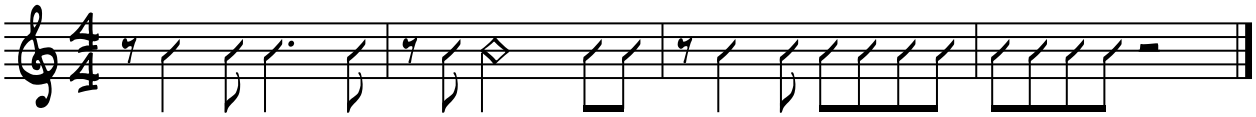


"Lady Bird"

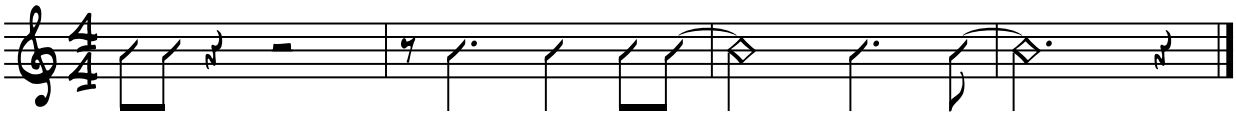
"Moments Notice"



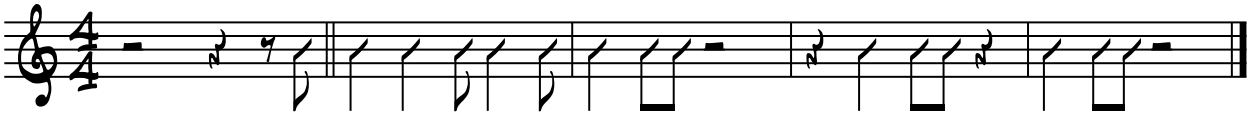
"Oleo"



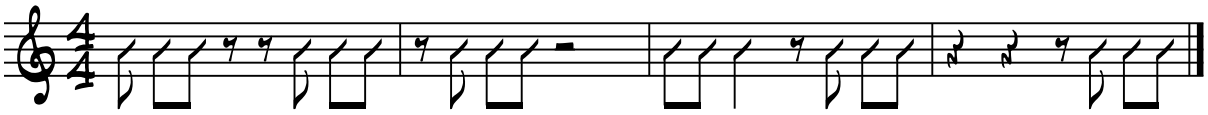
"Our Delight"



"Salt Peanuts"



"Speak No Evil"



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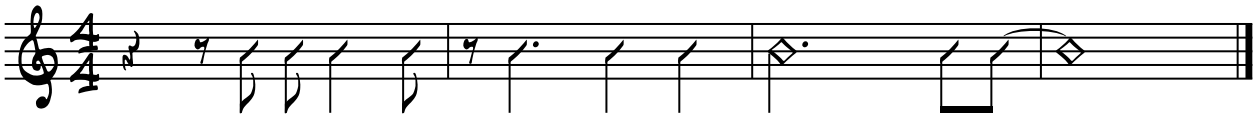

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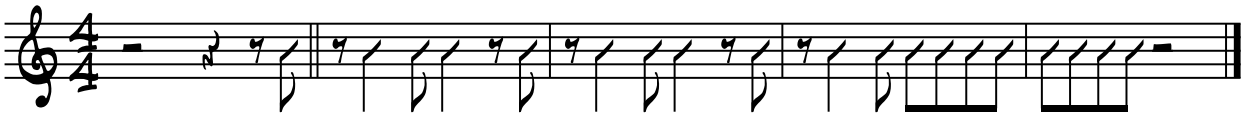
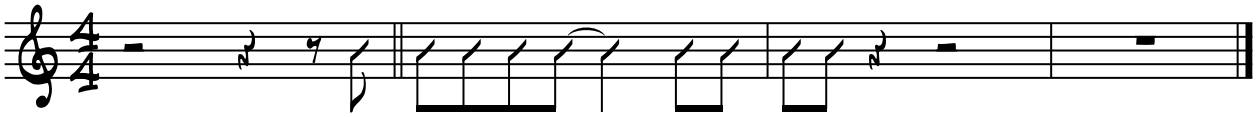
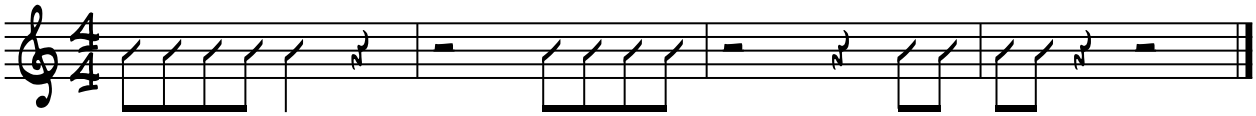


"Well You Needn't"



" Witch Hunt"



NOTES

CHAPTER 5

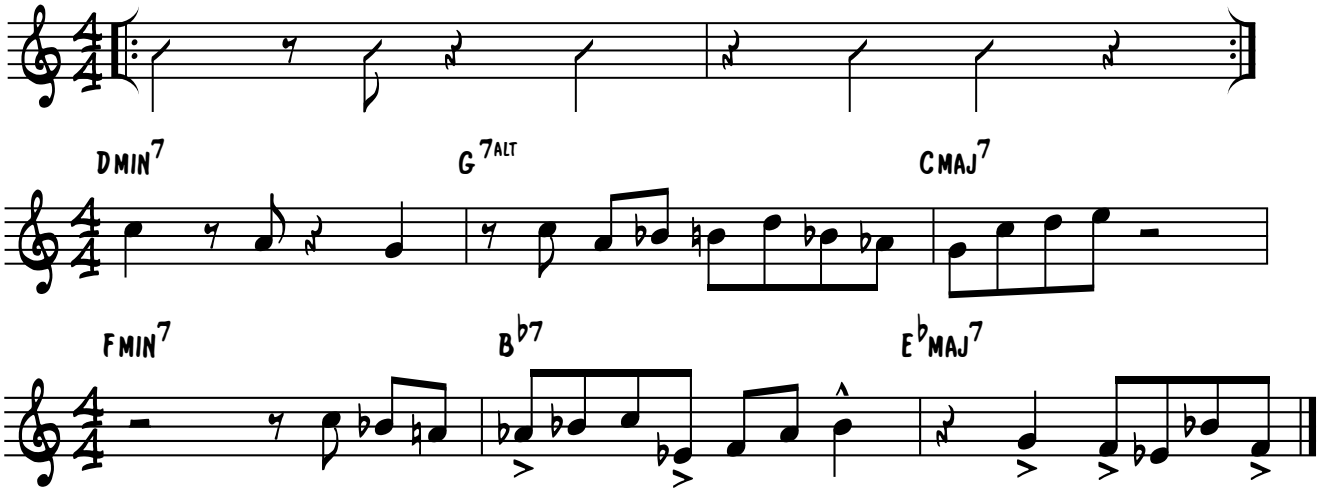
CLAVE AND SWING

In this chapter, we will look at how we can use a clave to help with our rhythmic interest in swing. Some of you may be wondering, “Wait a second, Jason. Clave is a pattern used in Latin music. How can I incorporate that into swing?” Good question!

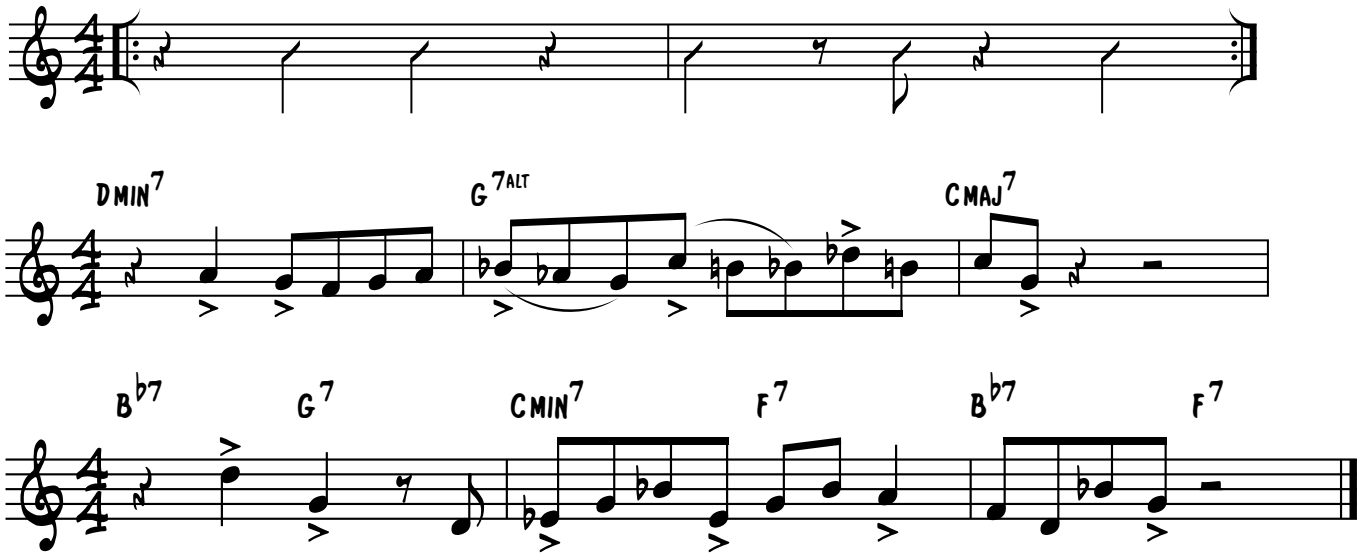
Clave (and its various patterns, i.e. the 2 + 3 and 3 + 2 son clave and rumba clave) is a HUGE part of Latin rhythms. However, we can utilize those same patterns in swing. There are countless videos online of drummers showing how they work on their swing by playing their drum kit alongside a clave pattern. As improvisers, we can utilize the same concept. The greatest part about using a clave over our improvised ideas is that the clave pattern contains both syncopation as well as accents that land on strong beats. This influences a *varied* rhythmic element into your improvisation.

In Chapter 3 we talked about filling our head with syncopated rhythm. In this chapter, we are going to “fill our head” with clave rhythms. There are a number of clave patterns that you can use. I am going to give just a few brief examples of some clave patterns (there are more and you can utilize them as well).

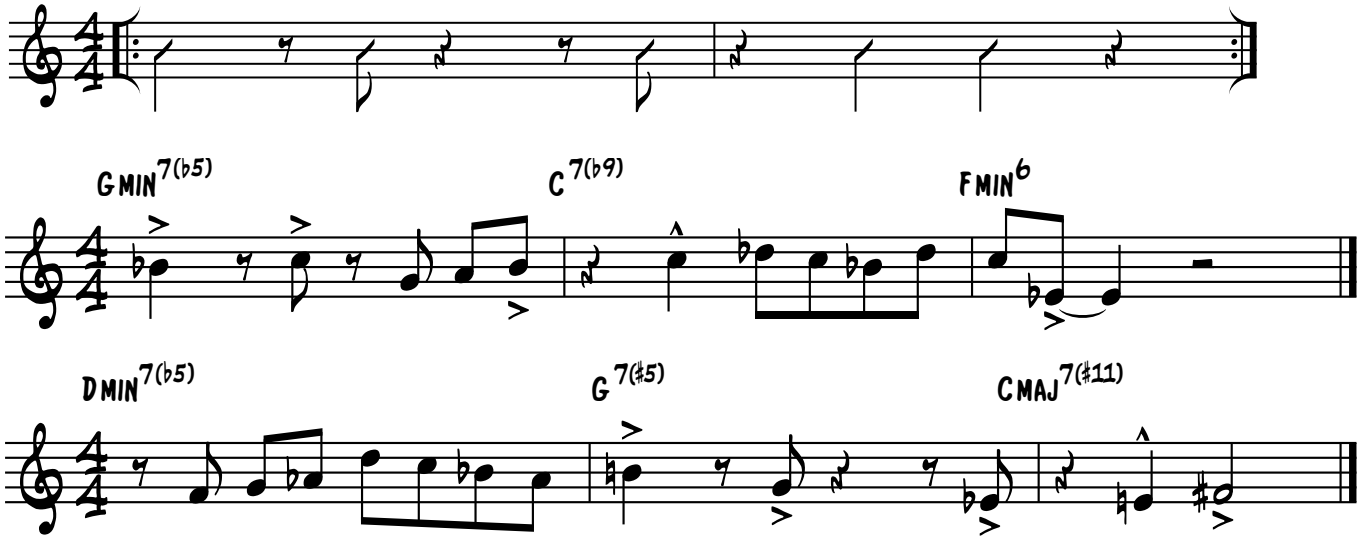
The first one below is the 3 + 2 son clave.



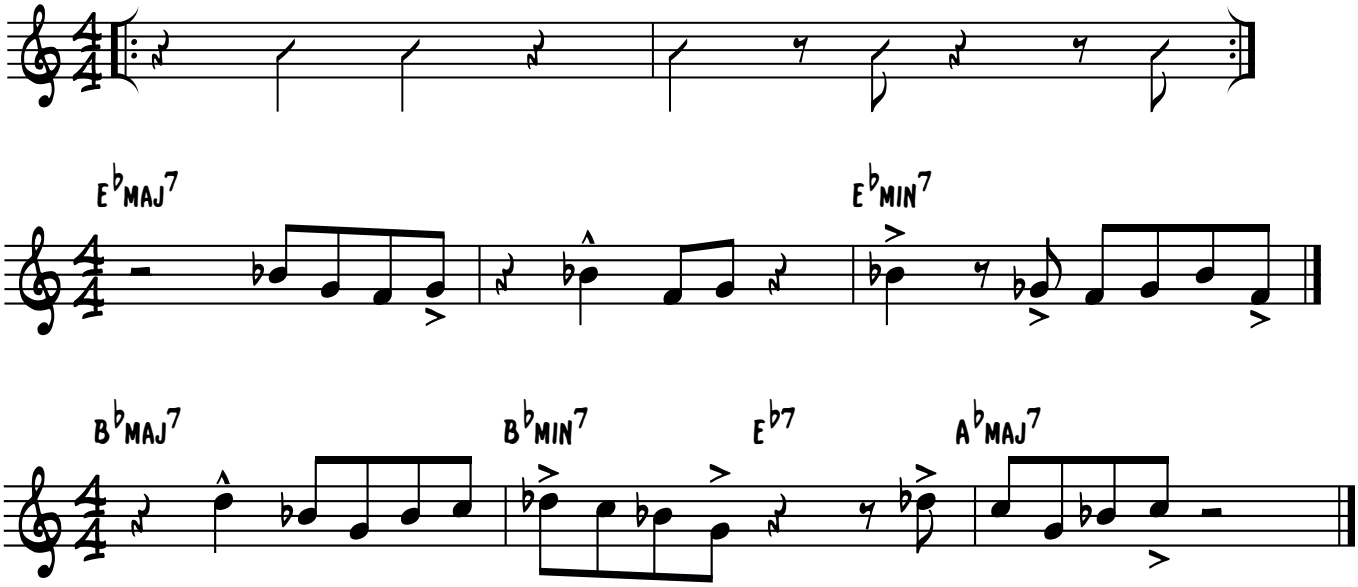
The second is the 2 + 3 son clave.



The third example is the 3+2 rumba clave.



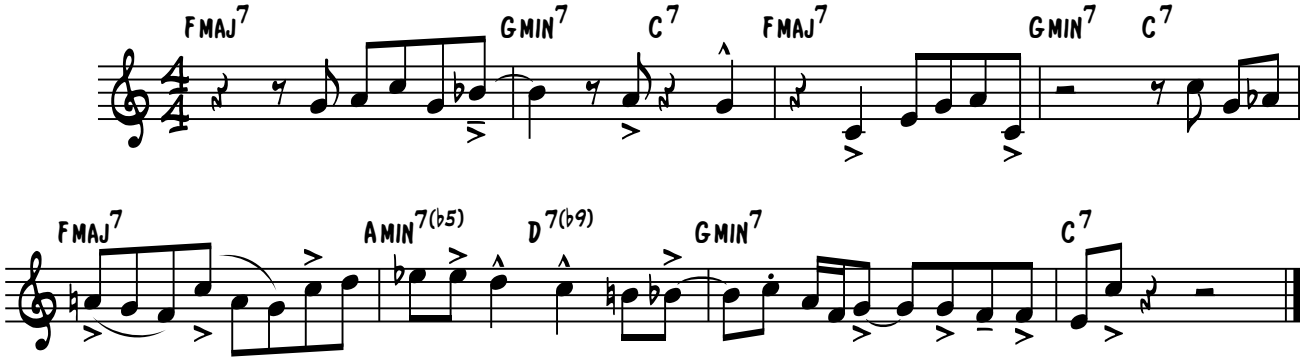
The fourth example is the 2+3 rumba clave.



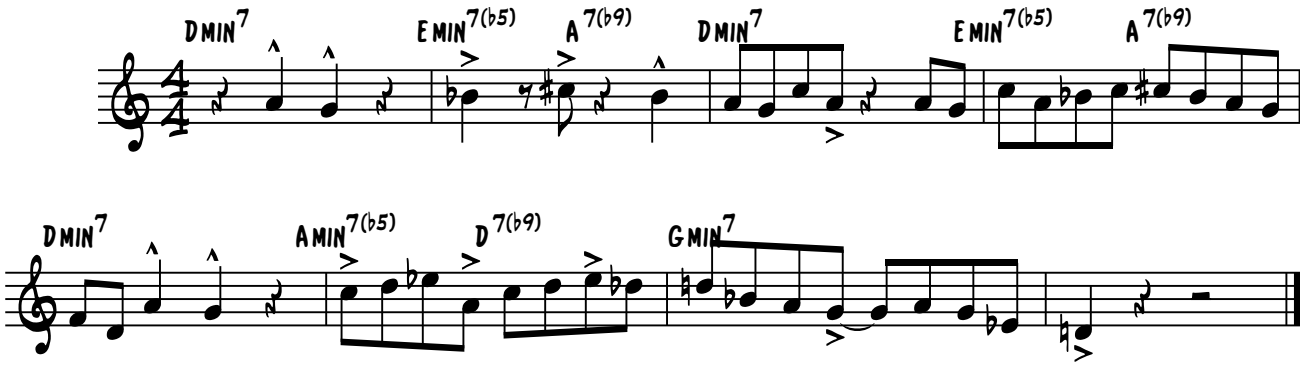
To implement this concept, practice improvising using just those rhythms over a song. Obviously, this is just an exercise and not something you would play on the bandstand over and over as that would be too predictable and would get rather boring quickly. However, when you have the feel of the clave going in your mind, you can create rhythmic interest in your improvisation. Some lines might have part of the clave pattern verbatim or you might find yourself articulating eighth note lines with the clave pattern. A great way to inflect the clave is to redirect your line each time the clave pattern is articulated.

Below are a few musical examples of how an improvised line can be influenced by each of the clave patterns above.

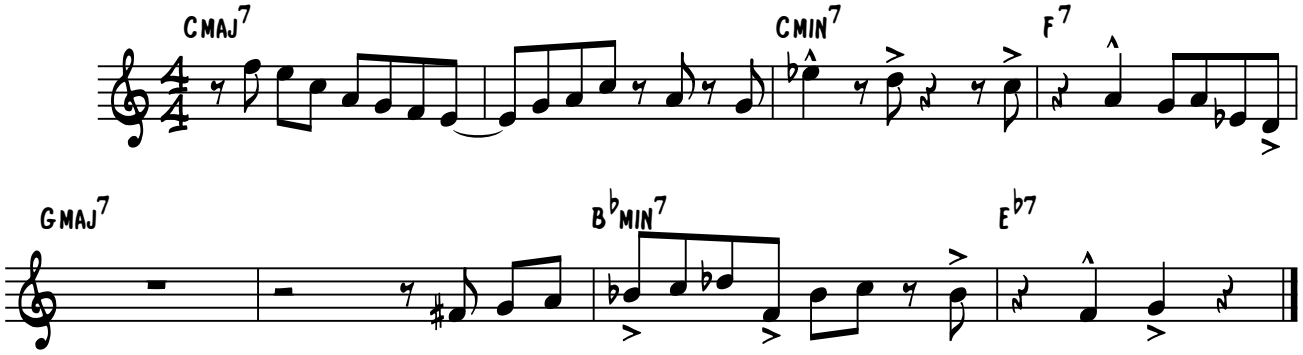
3+2 SON CLAVE



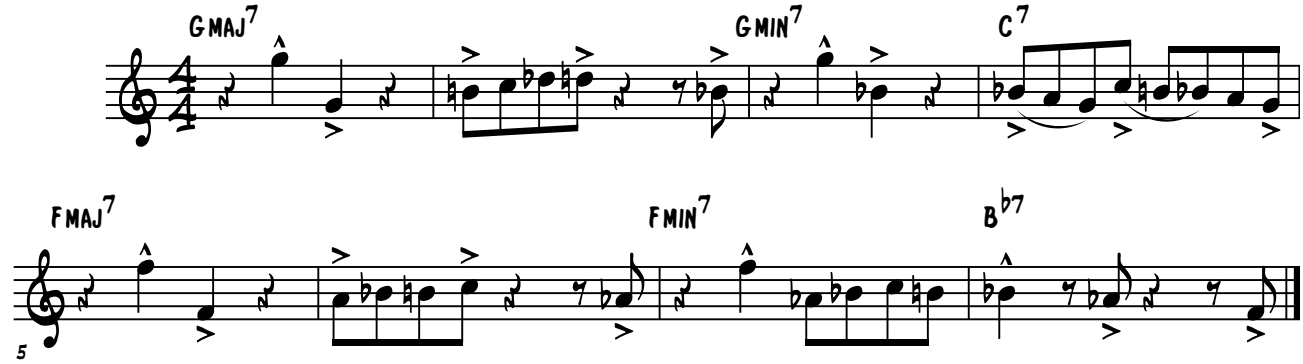
2+3 SON CLAVE



3+2 RUMBA CLAVE



2+3 RUMBA CLAVE



PUTTING IT TOGETHER WITH ETUDES

In this final chapter, we will take some of the concepts presented in previous chapters and use them together to influence a written line over common chord progressions. Etudes are pre-planned solos to be used as a technical exercise and not necessarily the improvisation itself. In this case, the technical exercise is developing the feel for breaking up the continuous eighth note line.

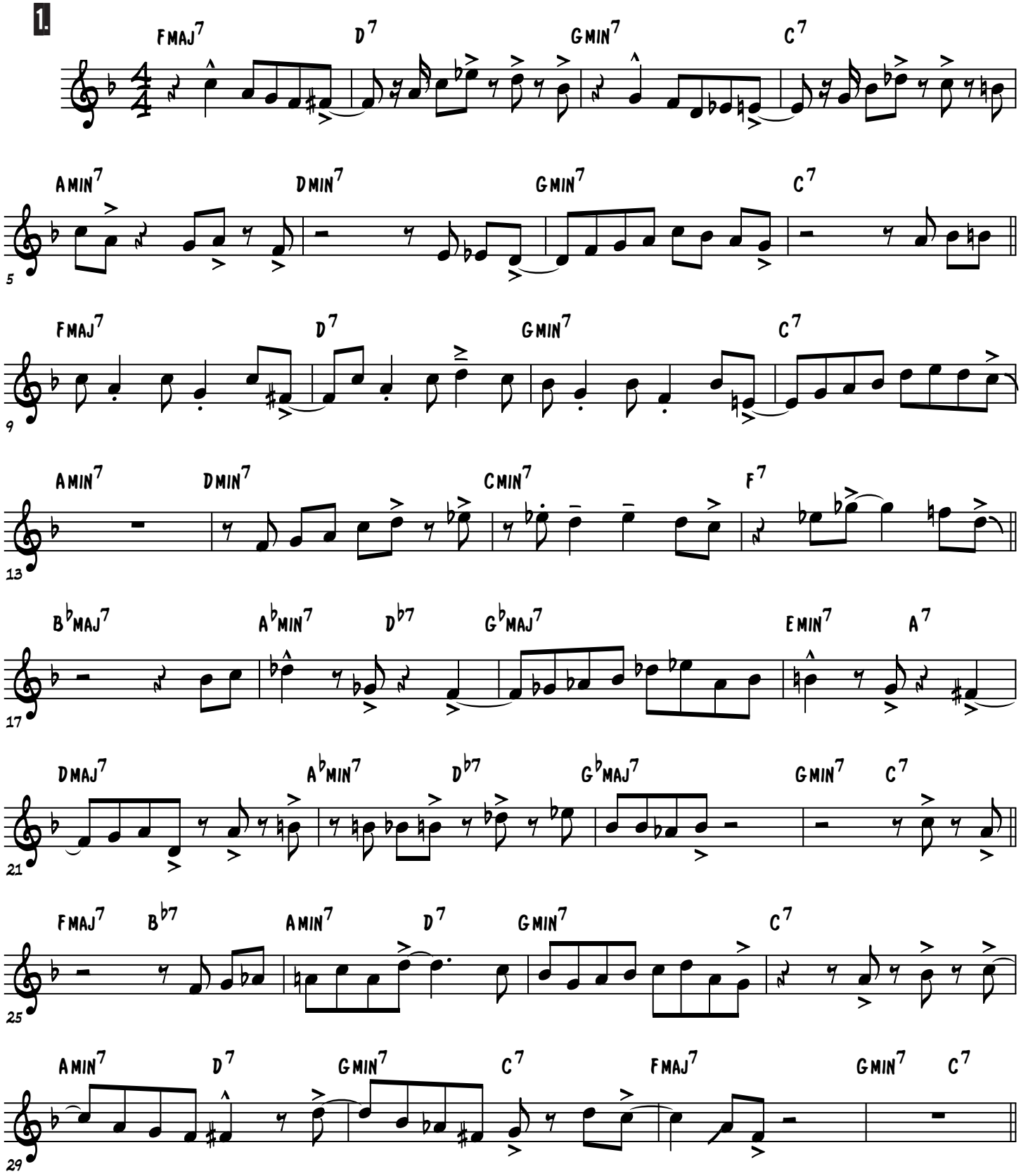
The three following etudes are based off of the chord progressions to popular jazz standards. To keep the etude clean and easy to read, the concepts presented in previous chapters are not marked. But, you should be able to tell where those concepts have been applied. I highly suggest writing your own etudes for songs that you are learning as they will help solidify and develop your understand of these concepts as well as the progression.

C

HAVE YOU SEEN MISS SMITH?

♩= 170

1.



HAVE YOU SEEN MISS SMITH?

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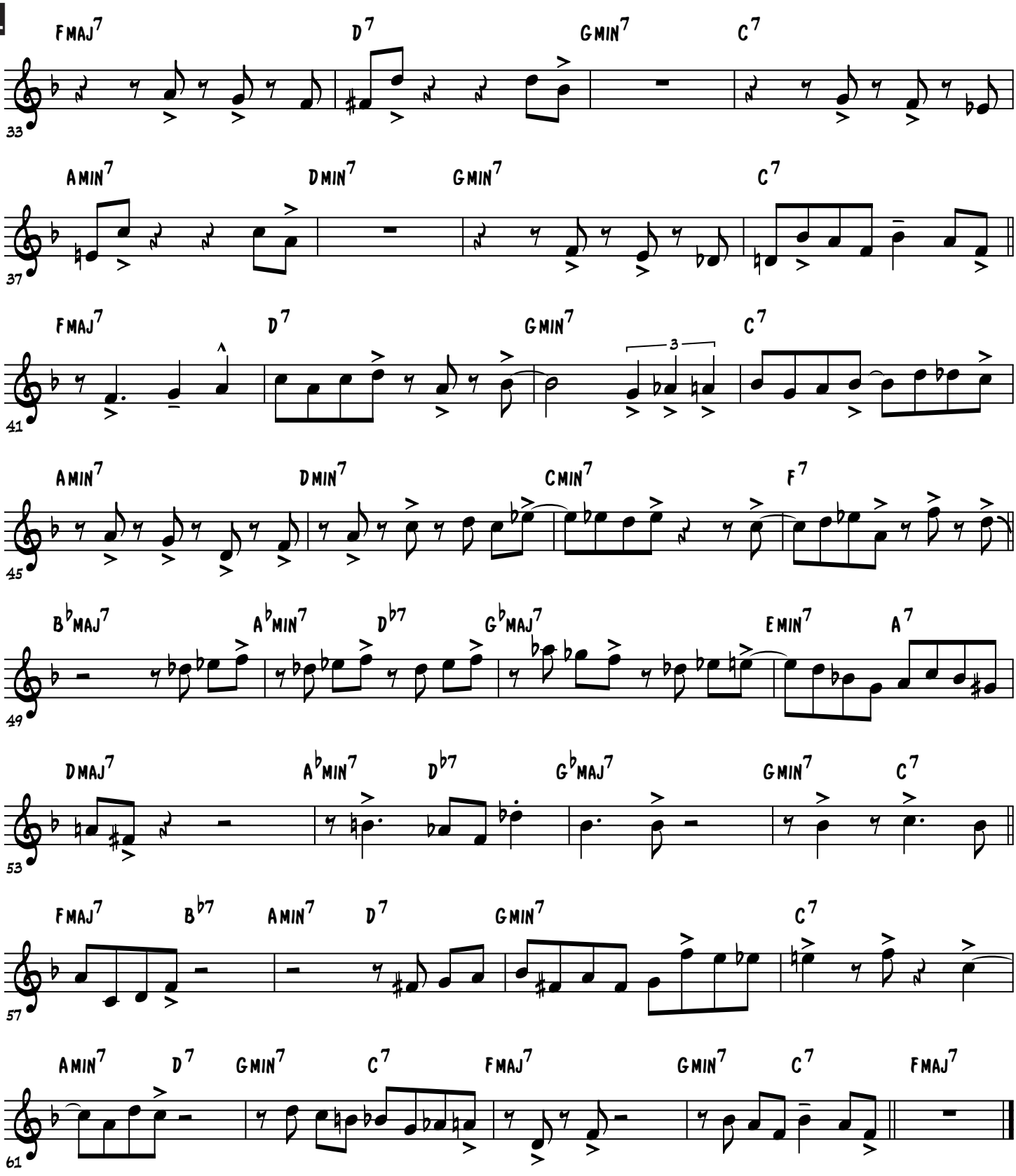

B♭

HAVE YOU SEEN MISS SMITH?

♩= 170

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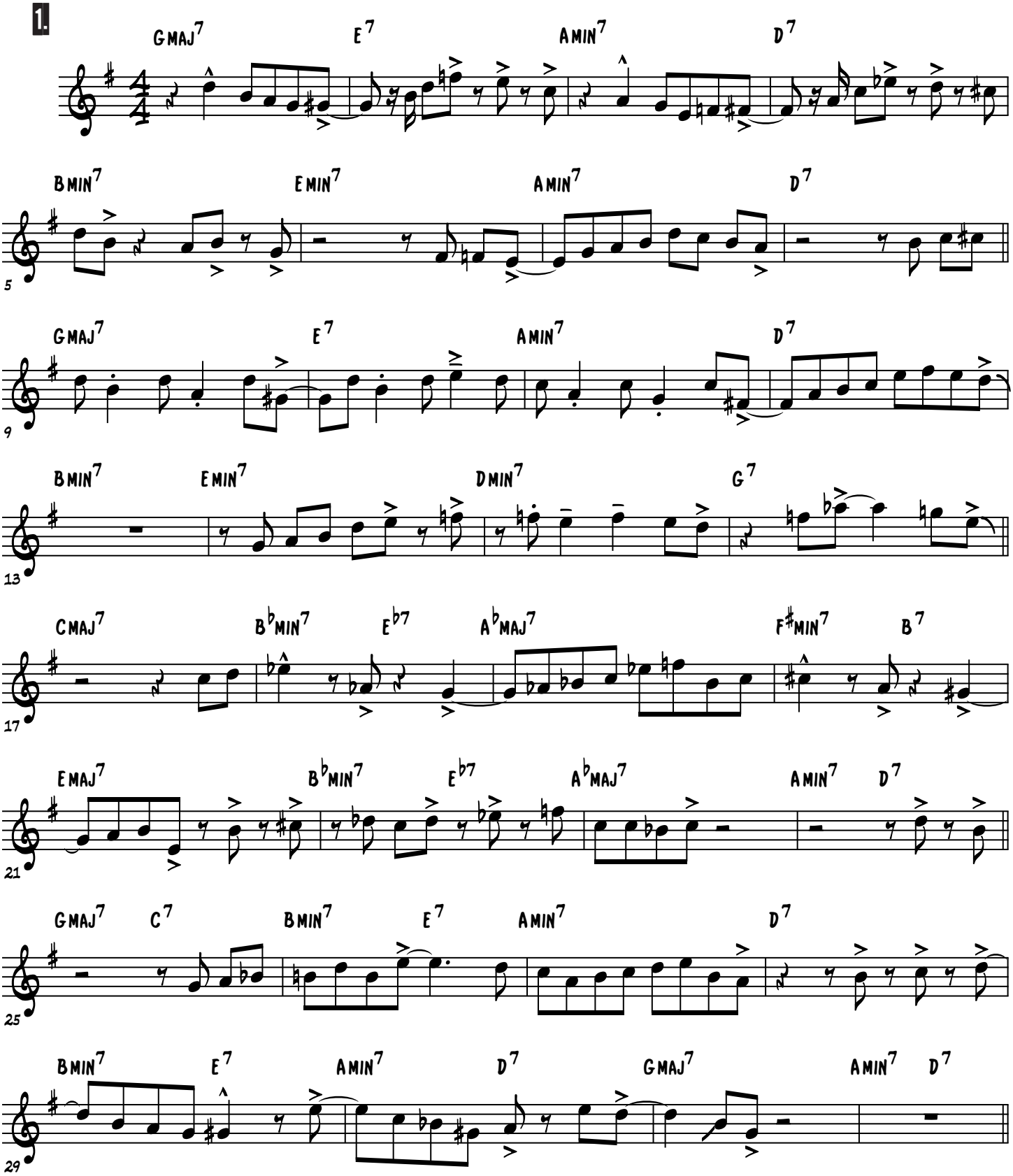

HAVE YOU SEEN MISS SMITH?

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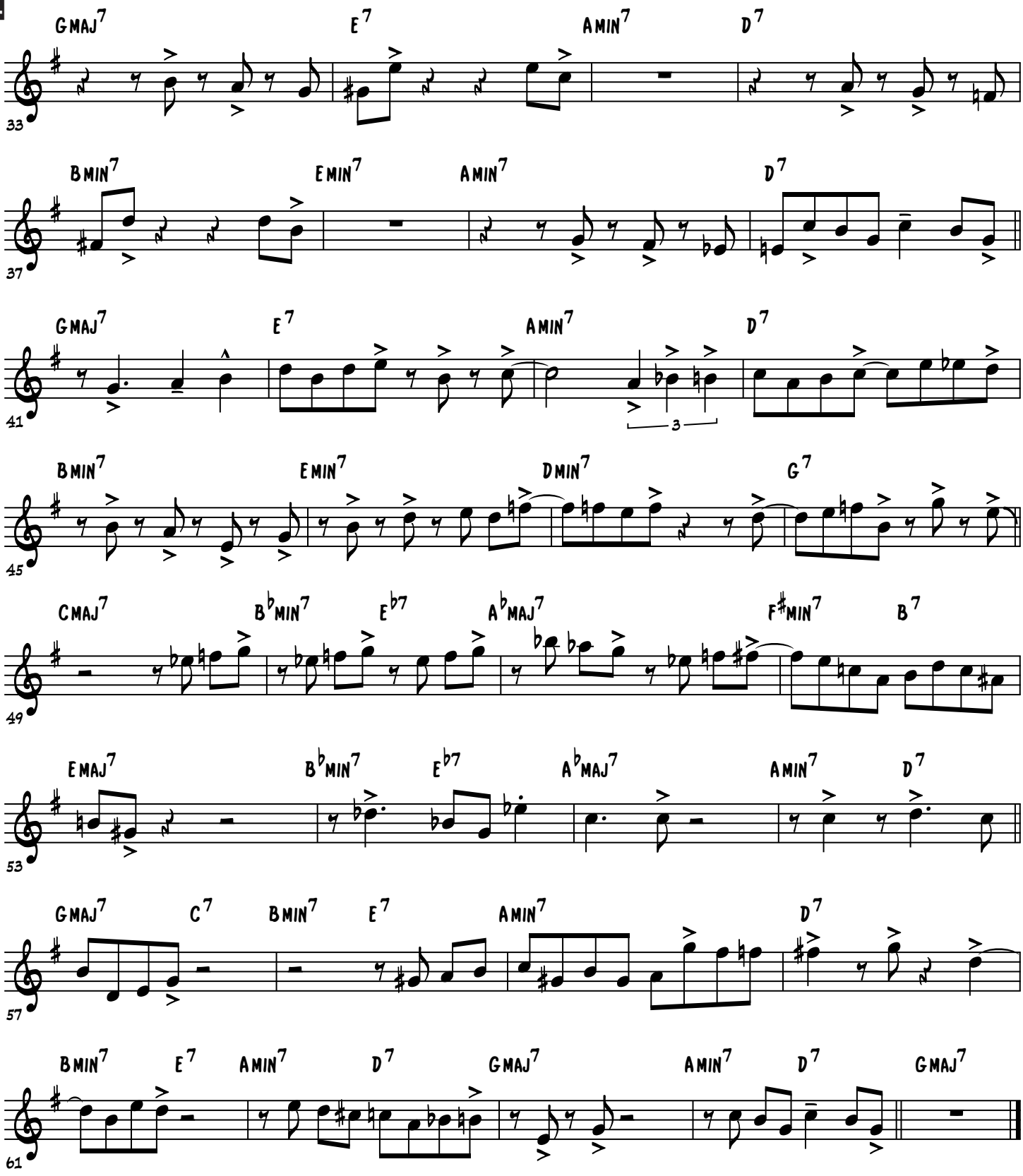

E♭

HAVE YOU SEEN MISS SMITH?

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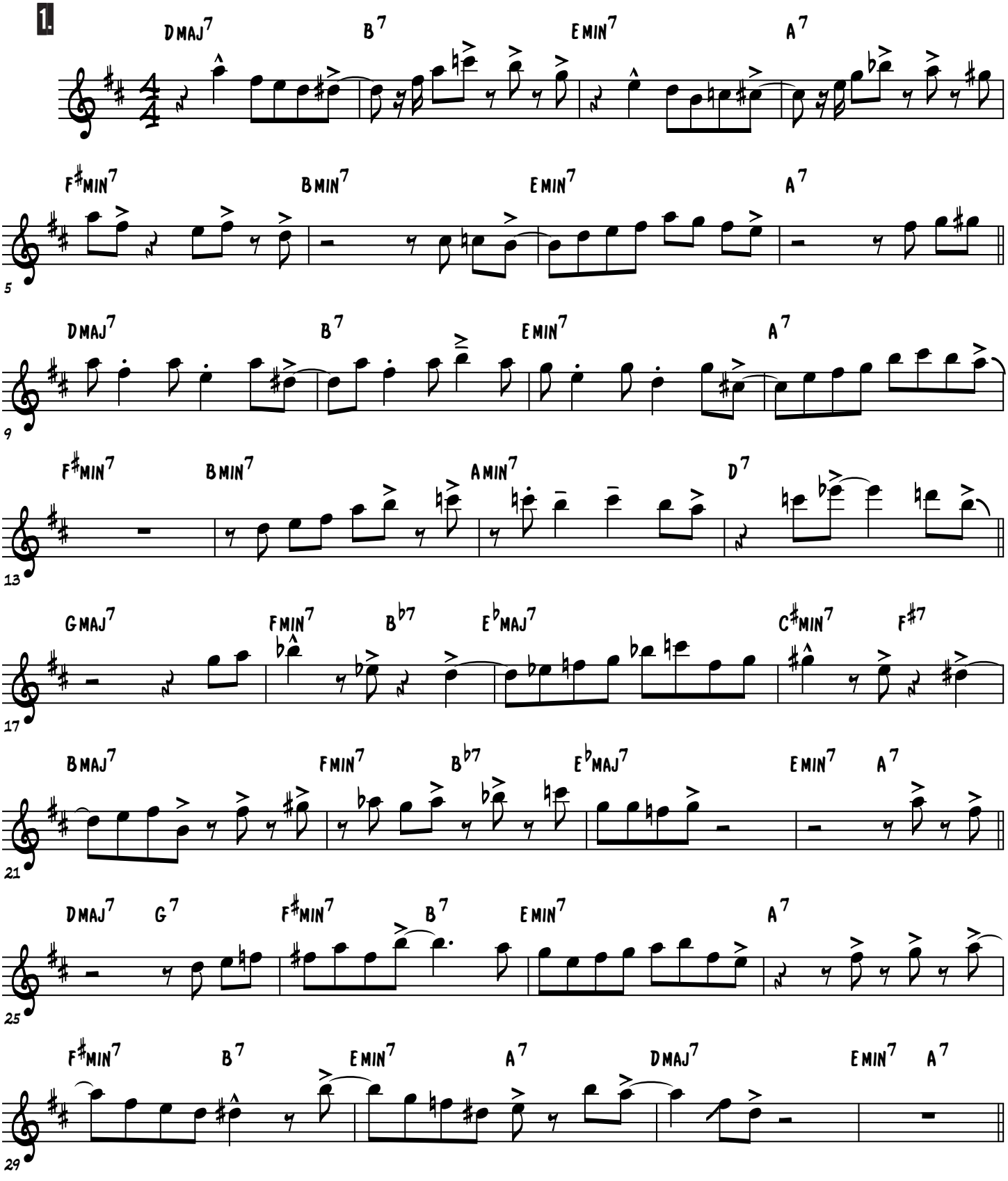

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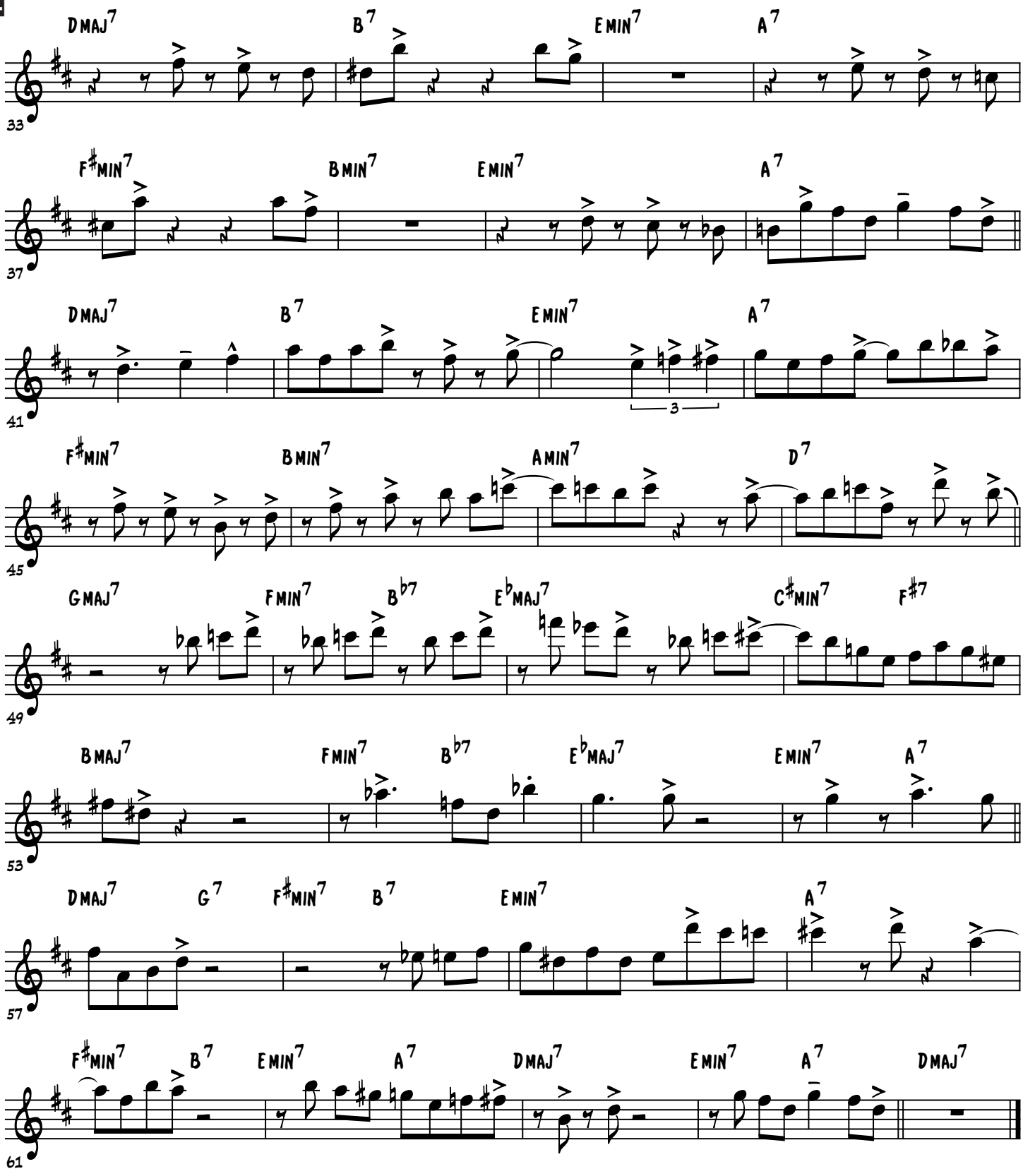

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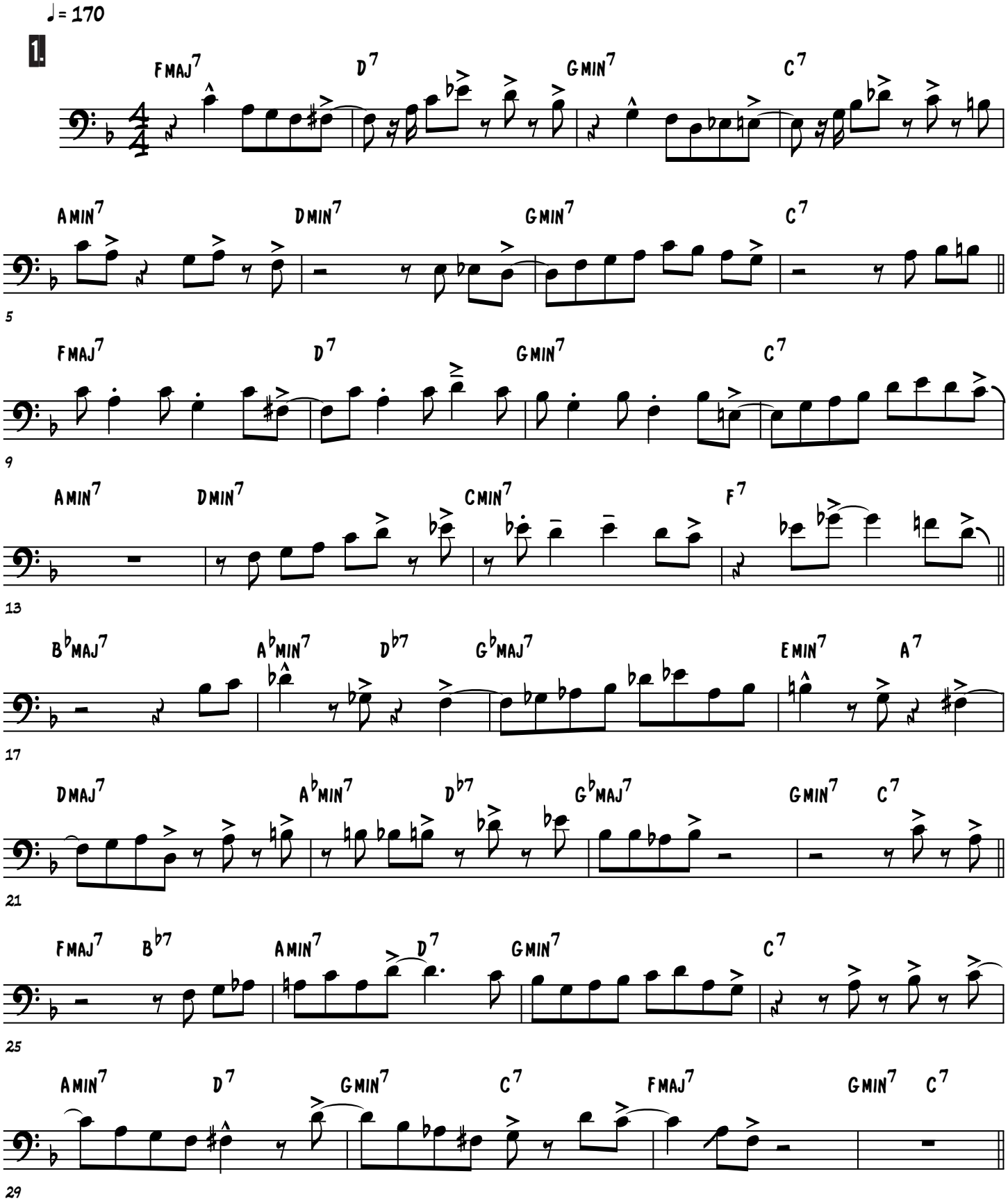

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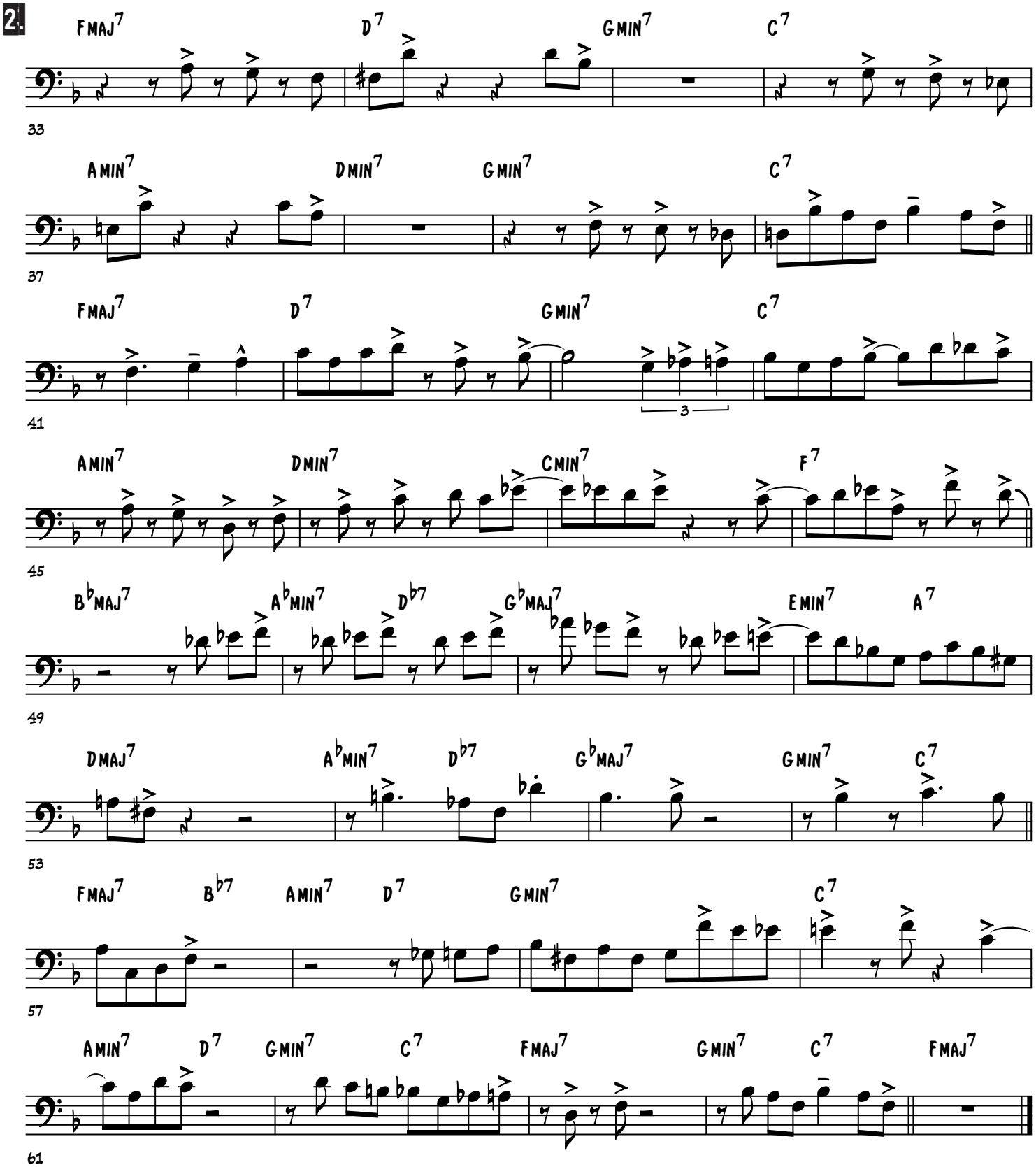

C

DRIVE ME TO THE SUN

♩= 140

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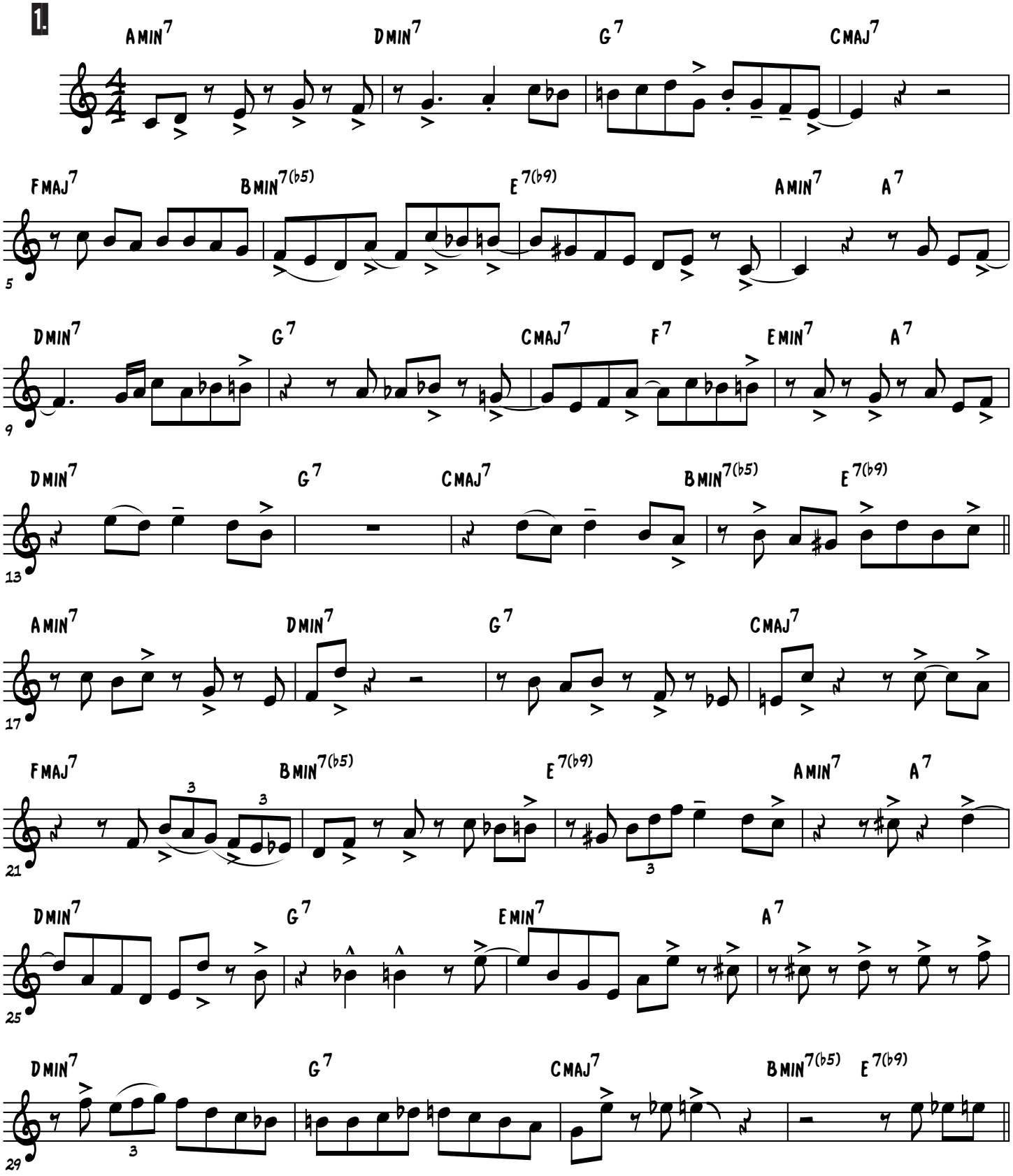

DRIVE ME TO THE SUN

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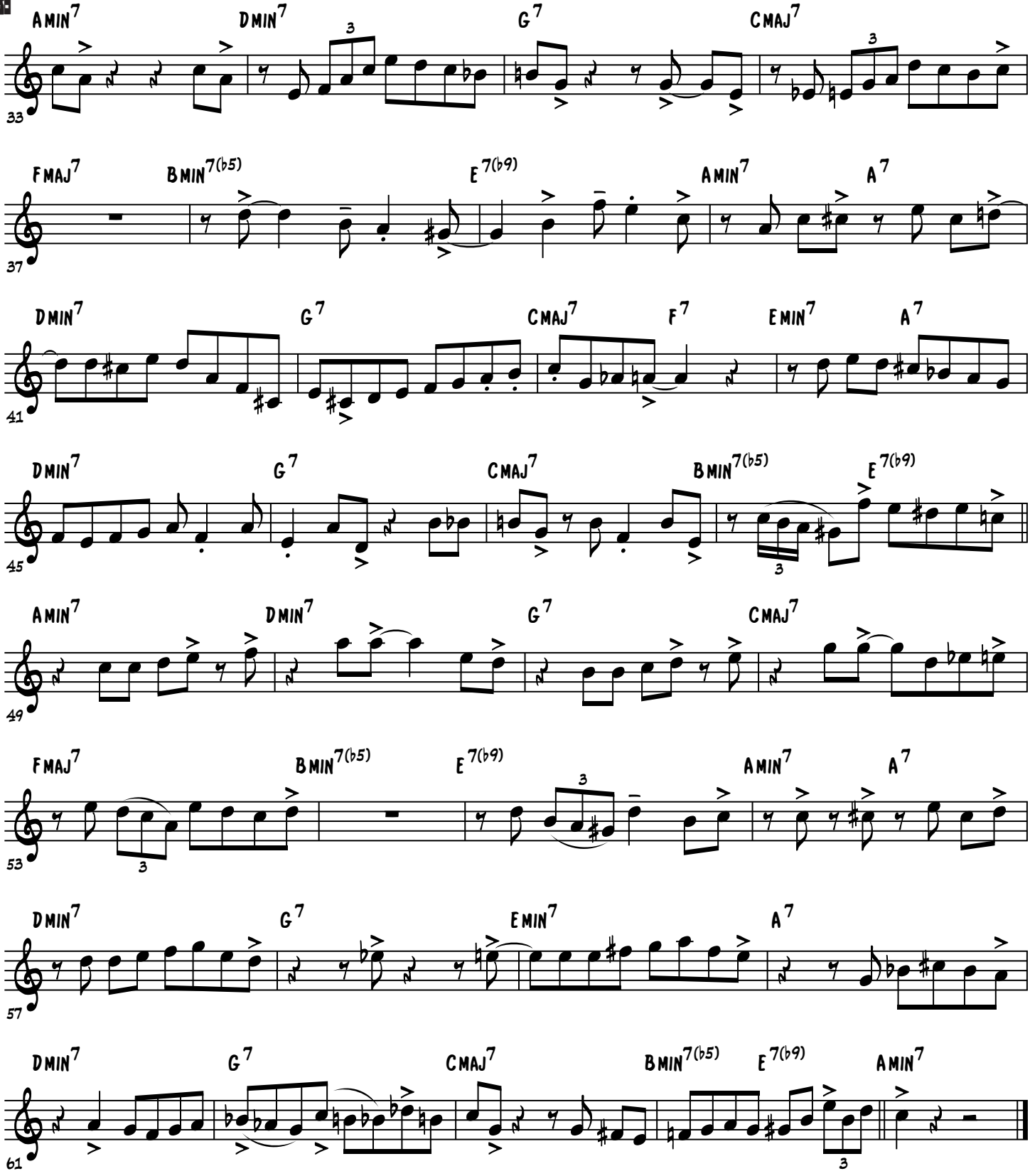

B♭

DRIVE ME TO THE SUN

♩ = 140

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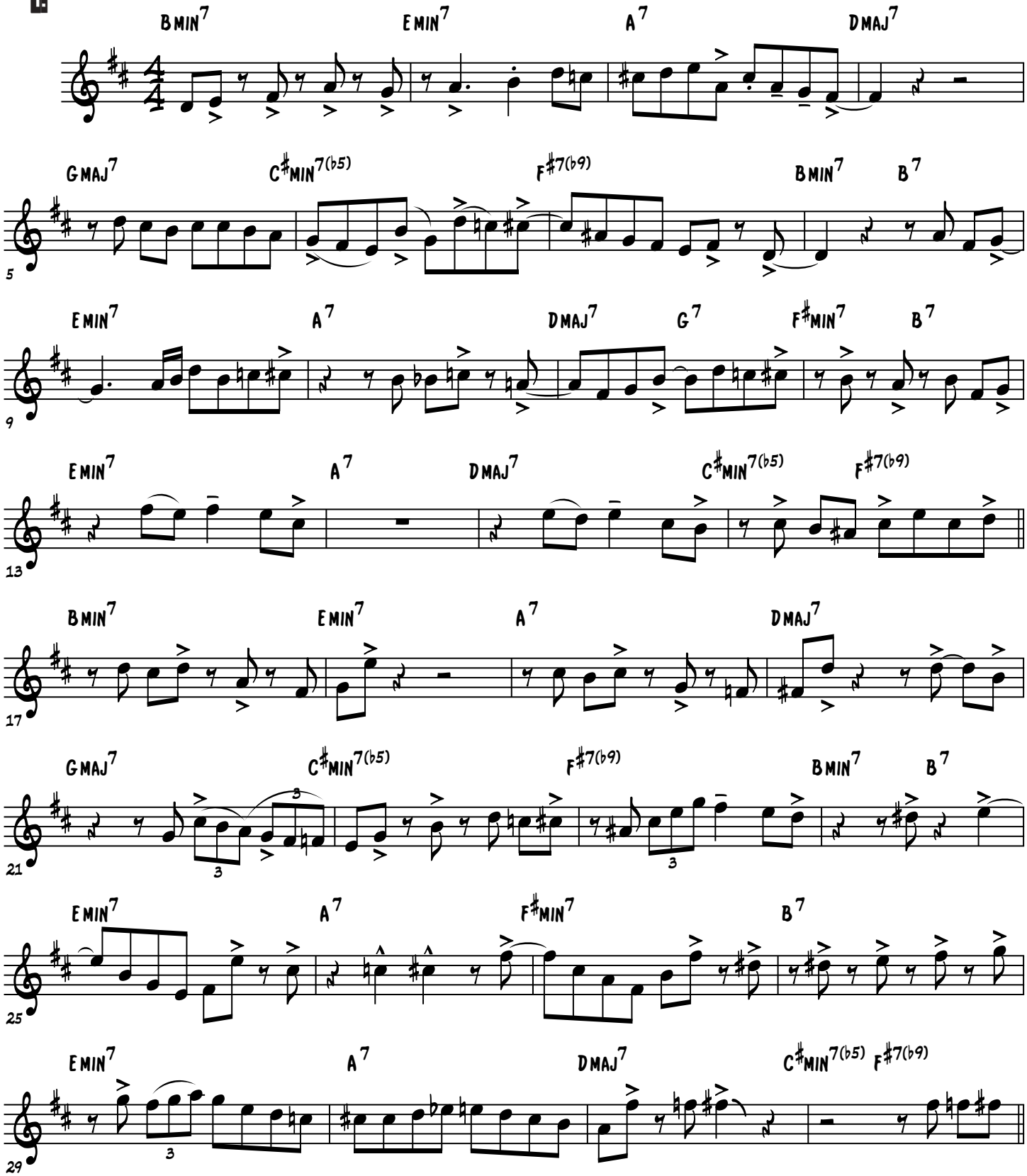

DRIVE ME TO THE SUN

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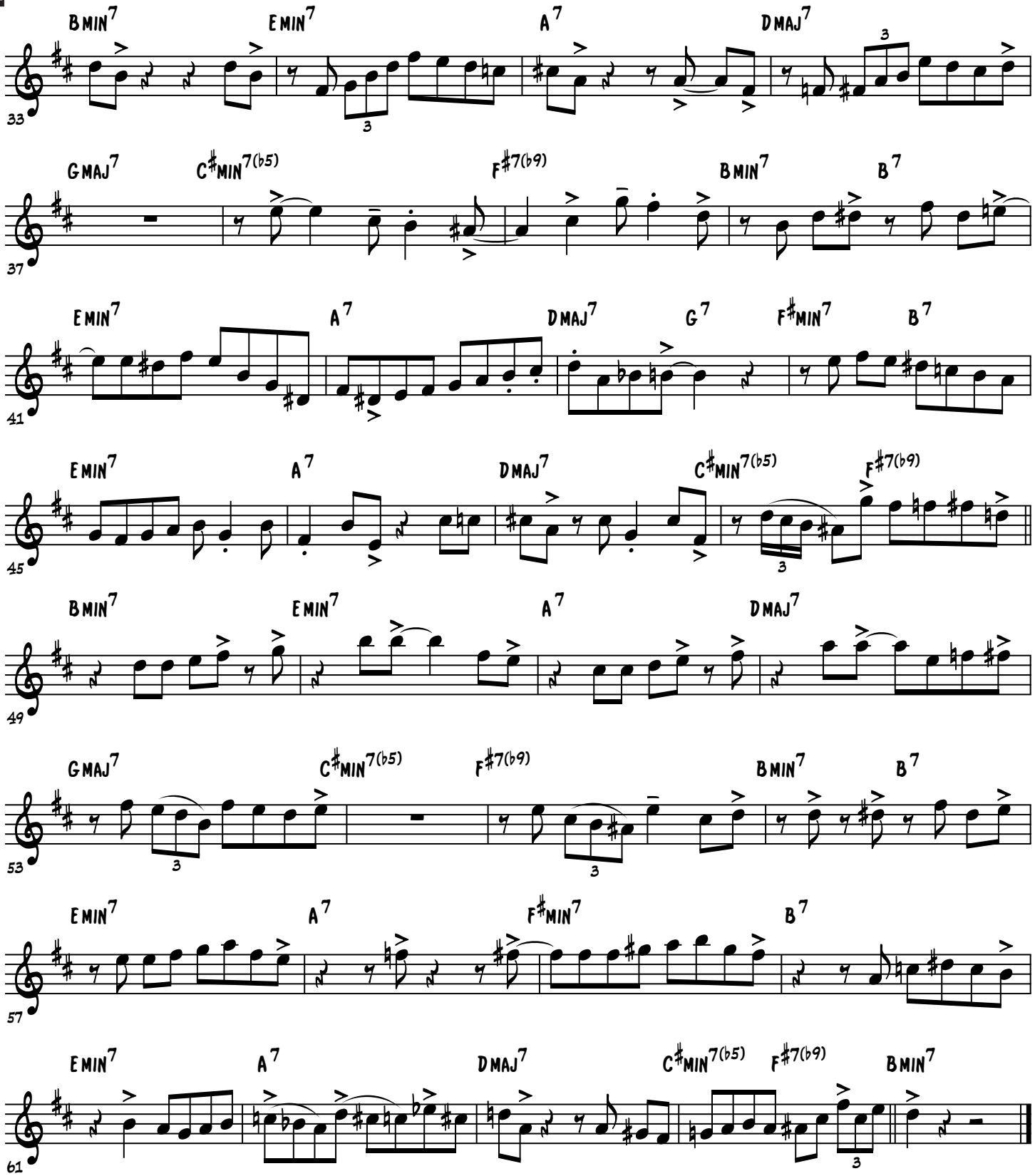

E♭

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♩= 140

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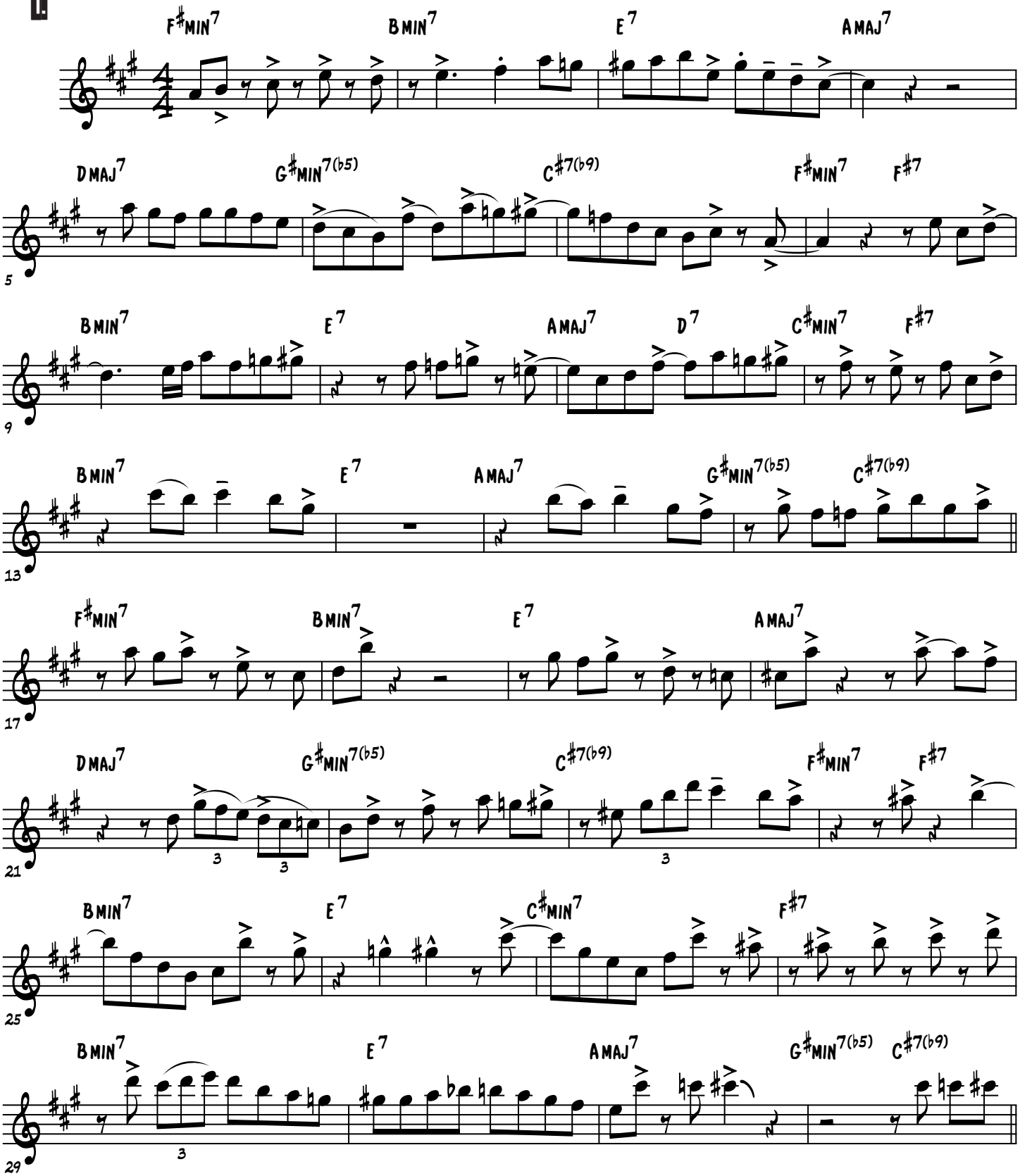

DRIVE ME TO THE SUN

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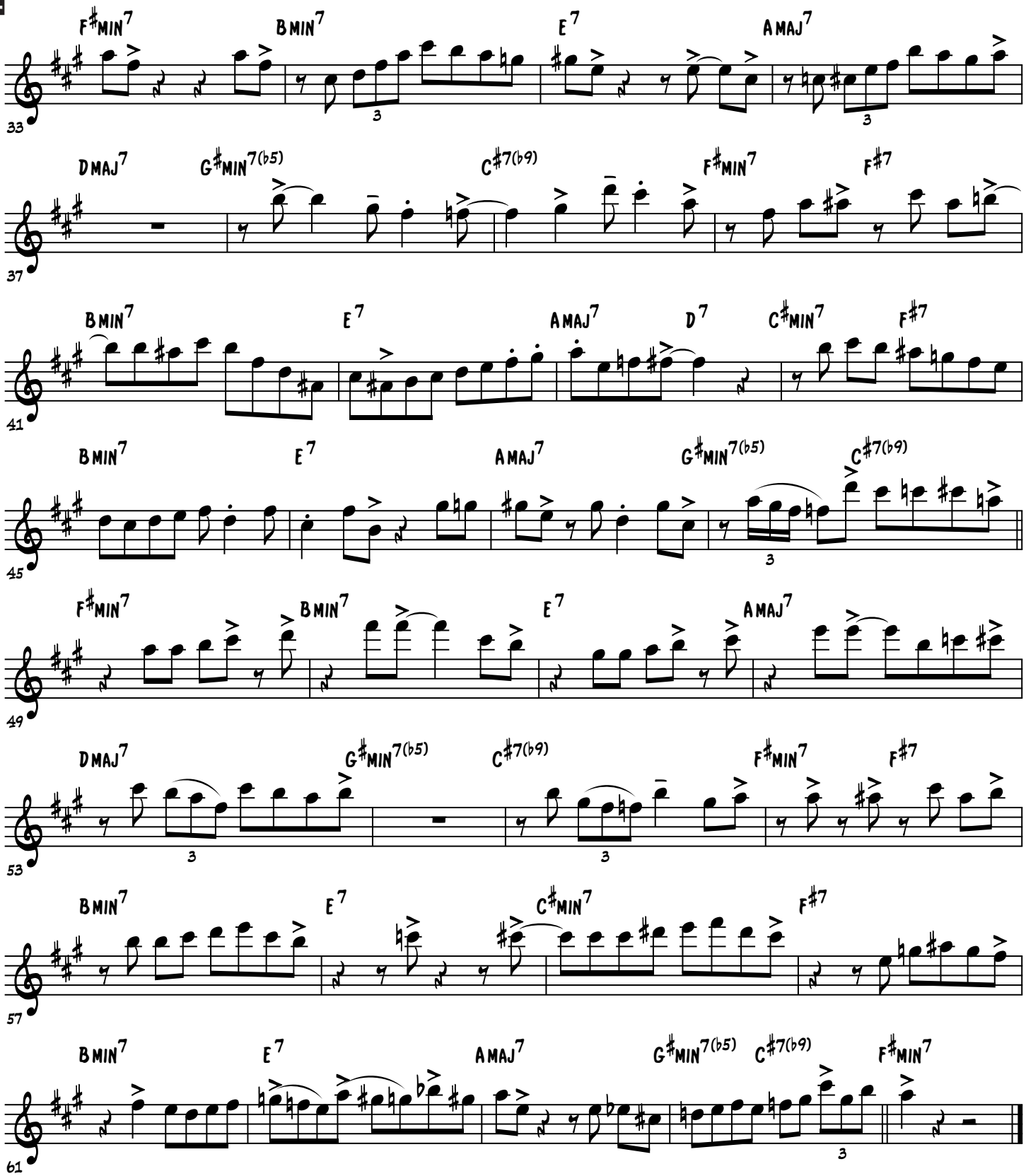

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♩= 140

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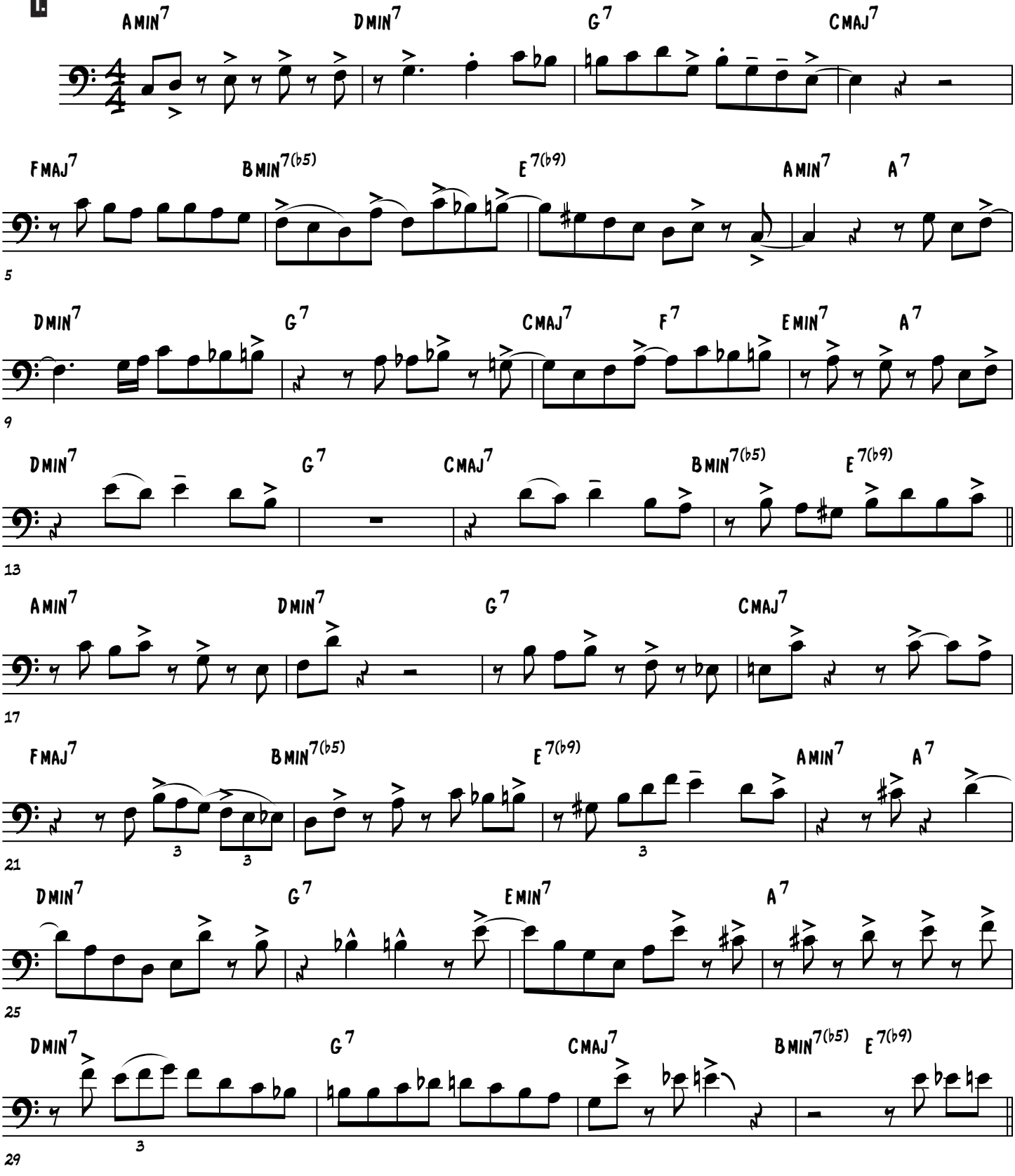

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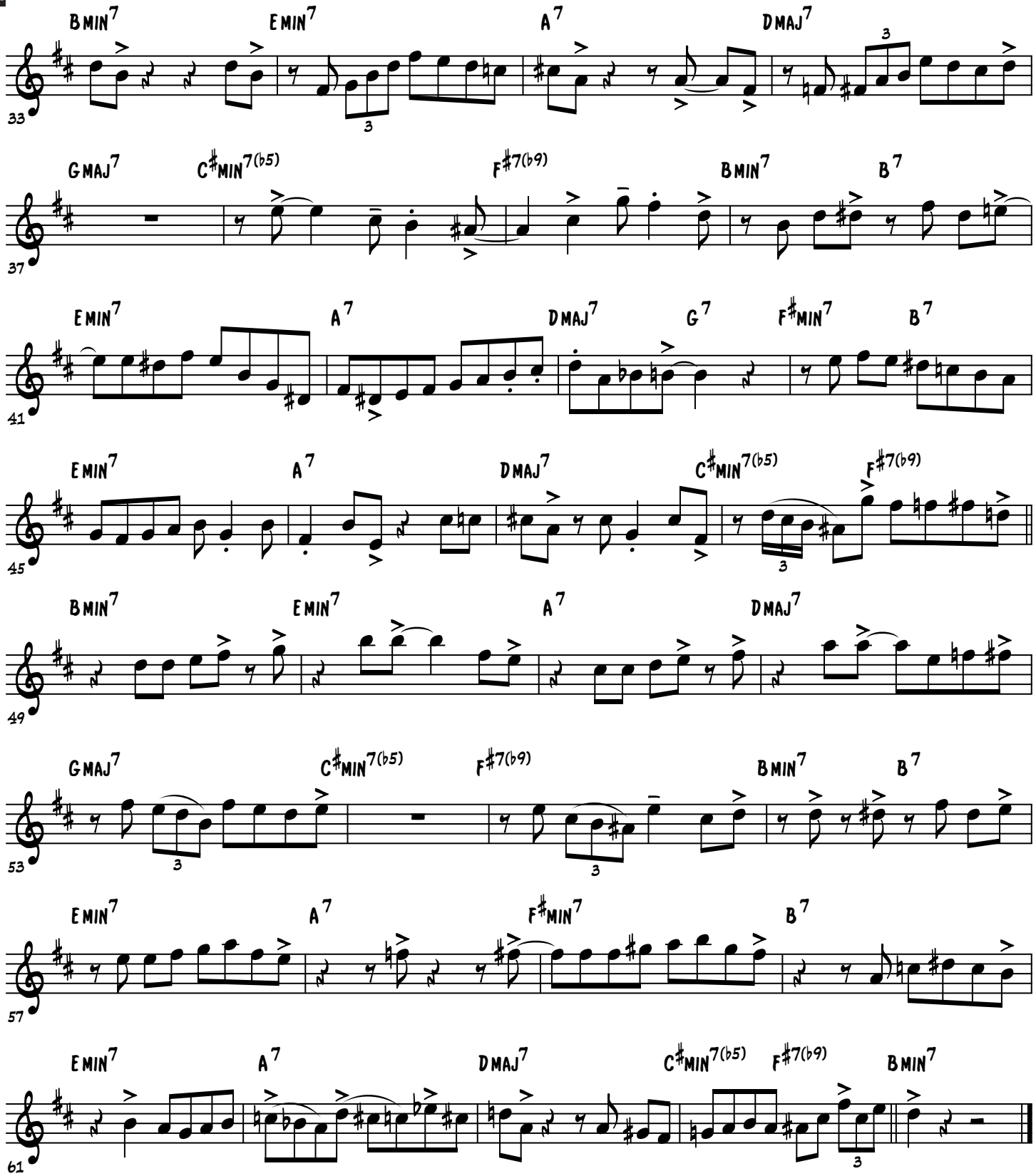

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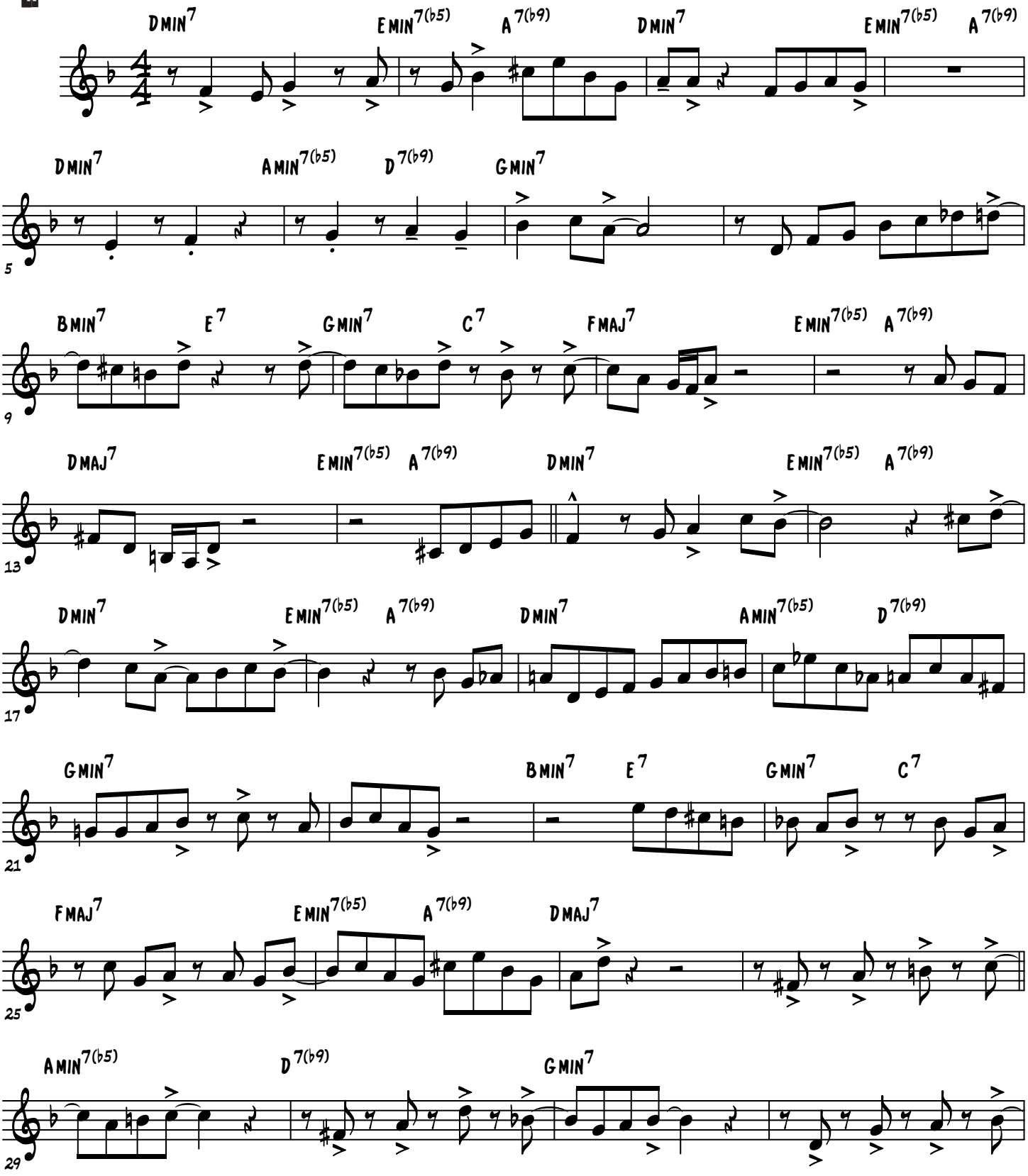

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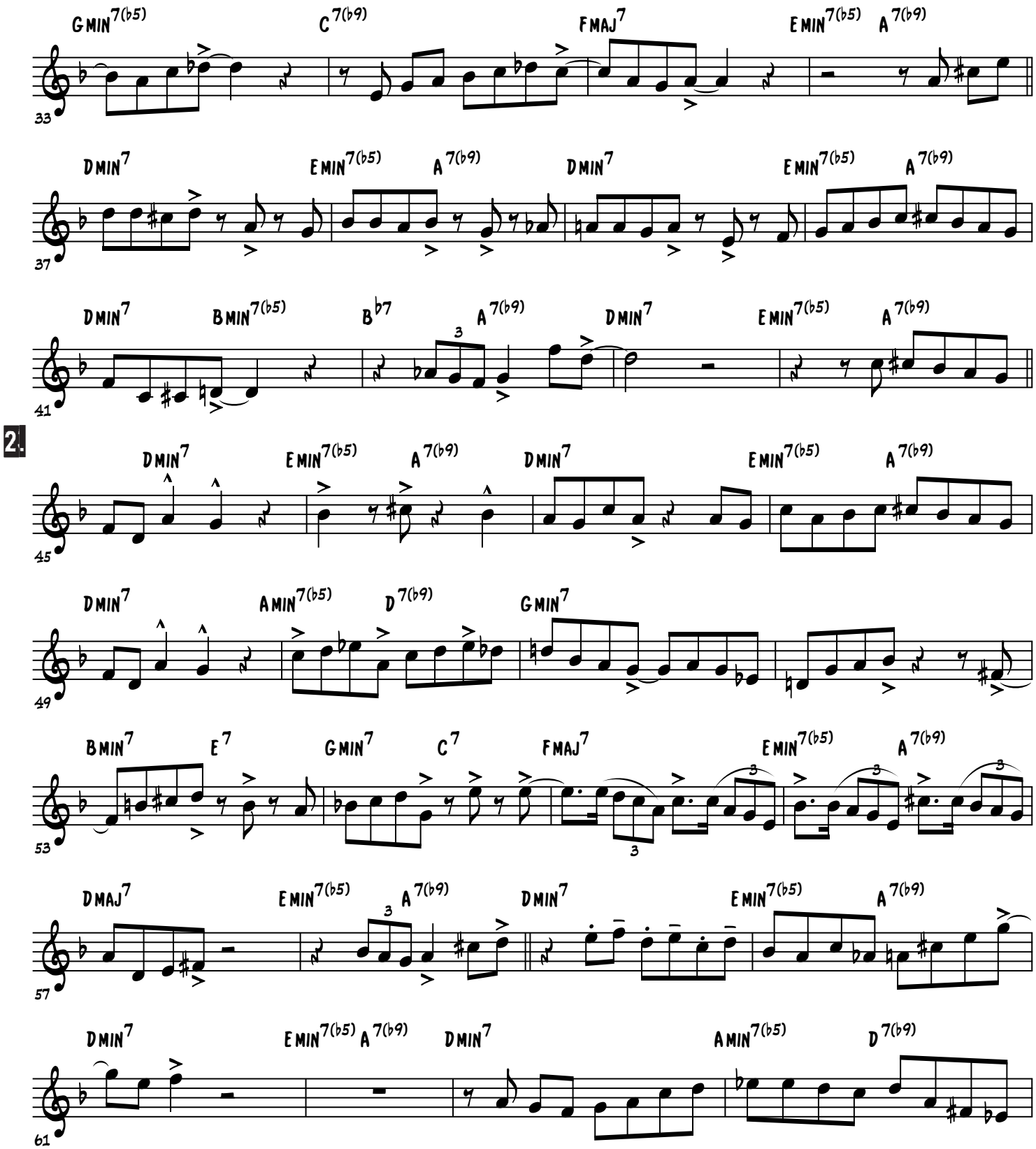

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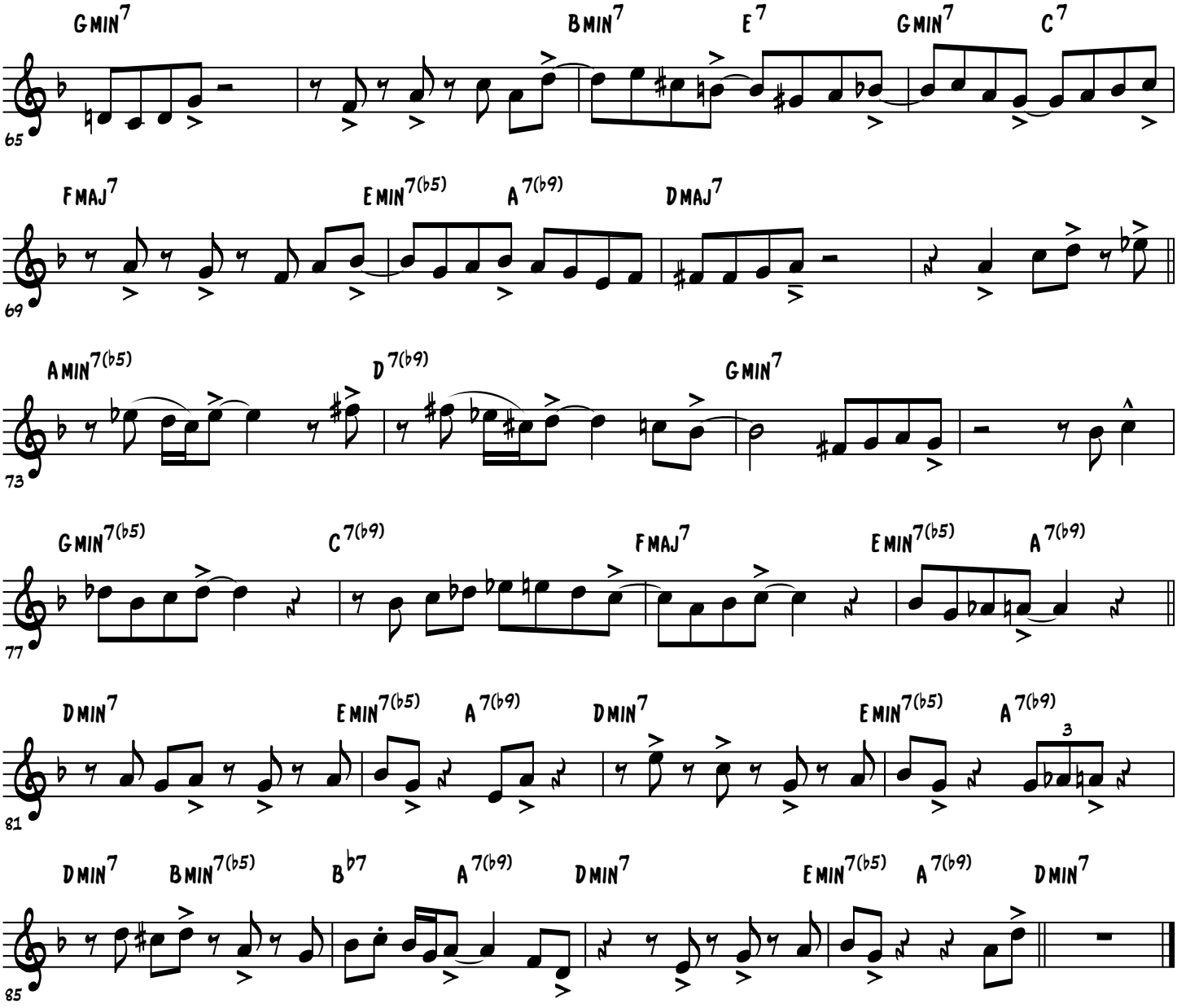

B♭

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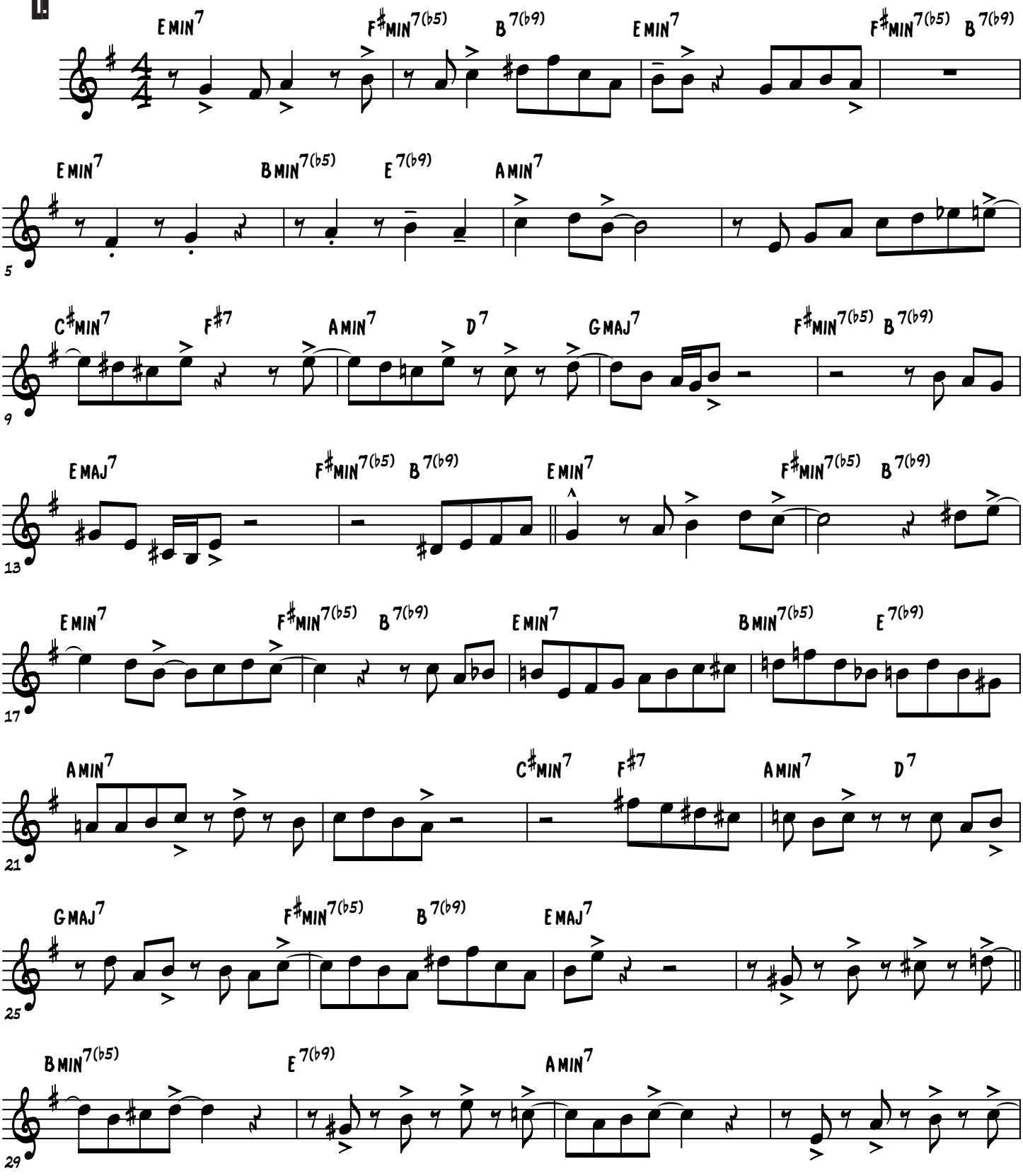

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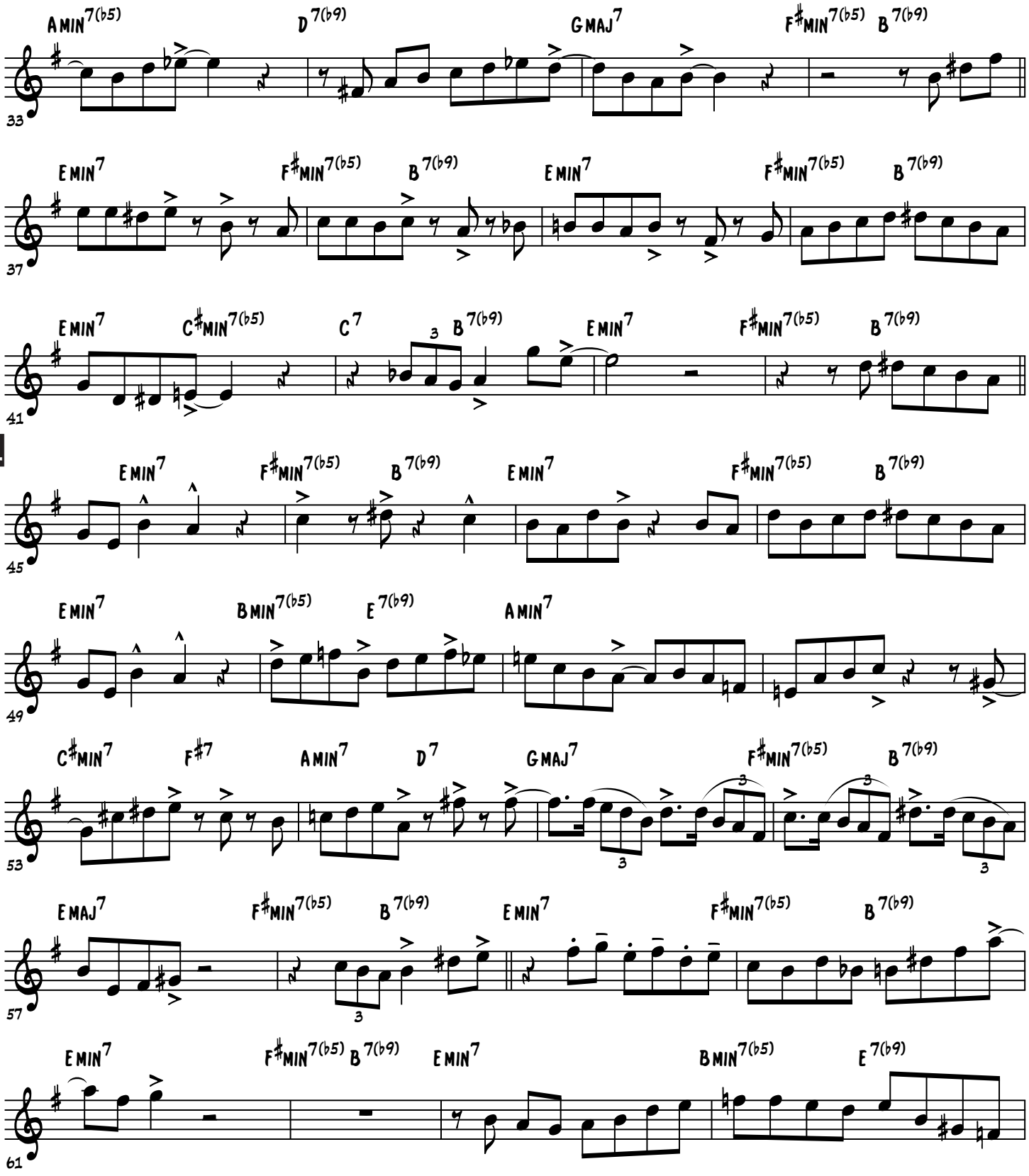

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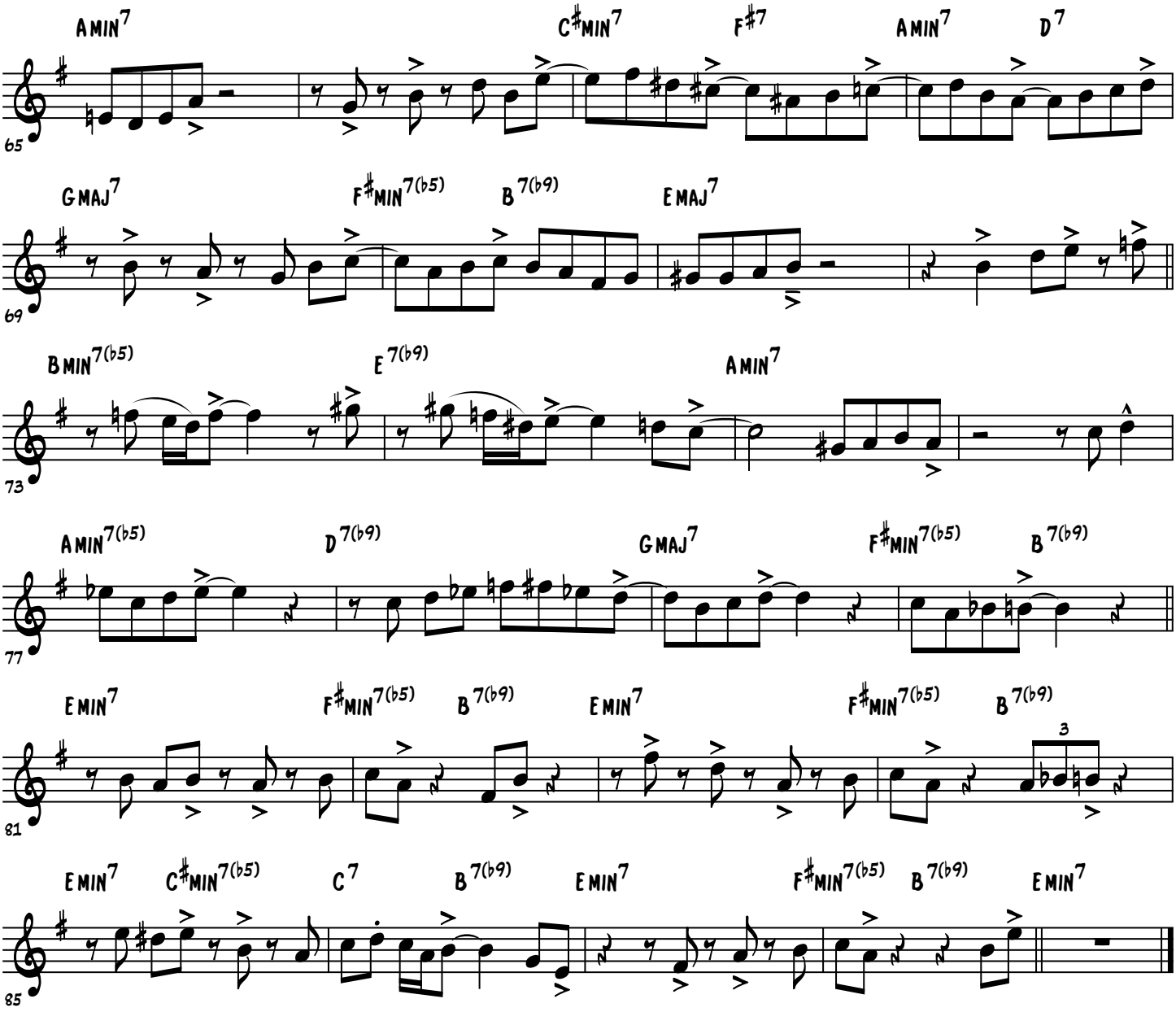

E♭

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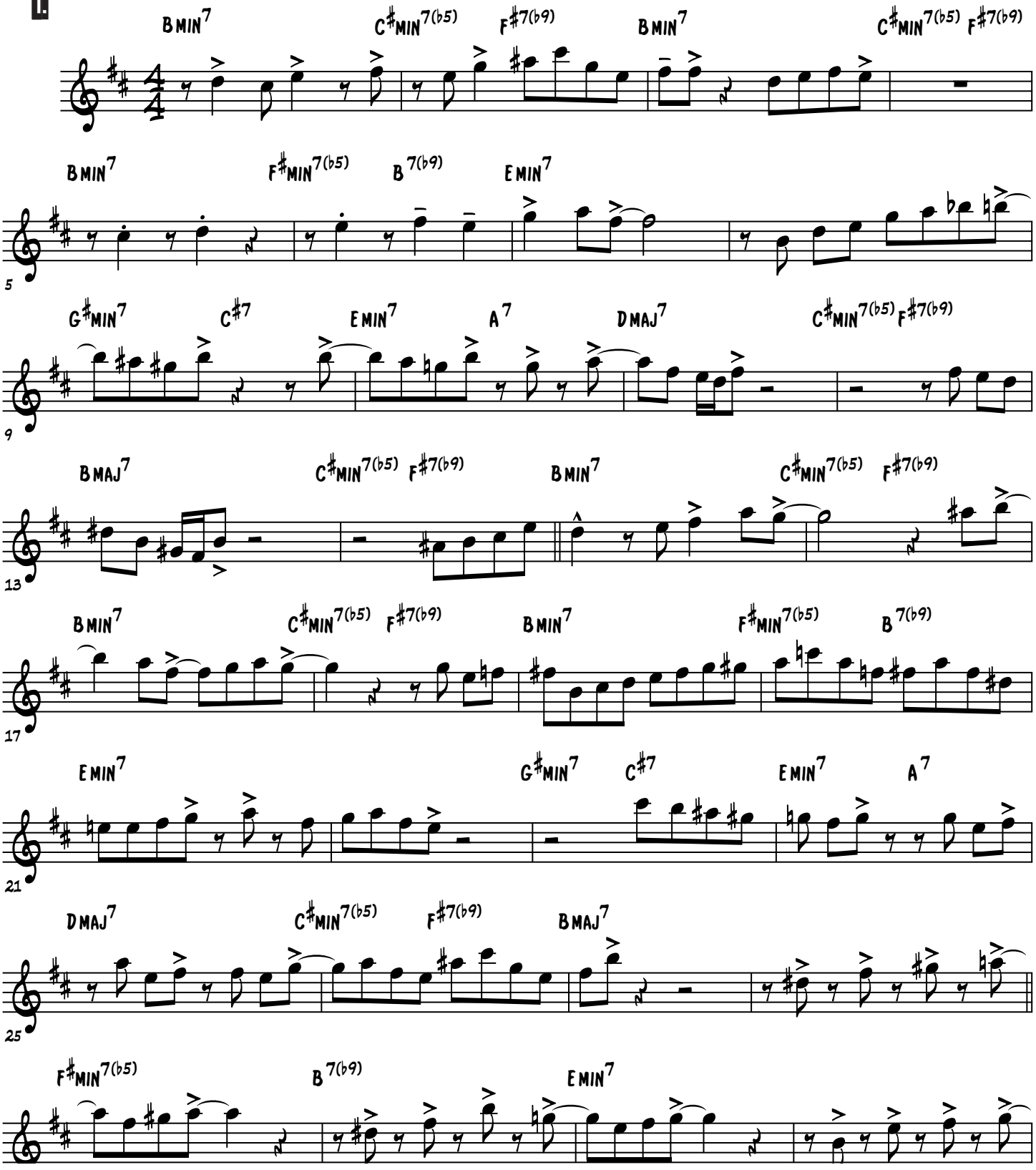

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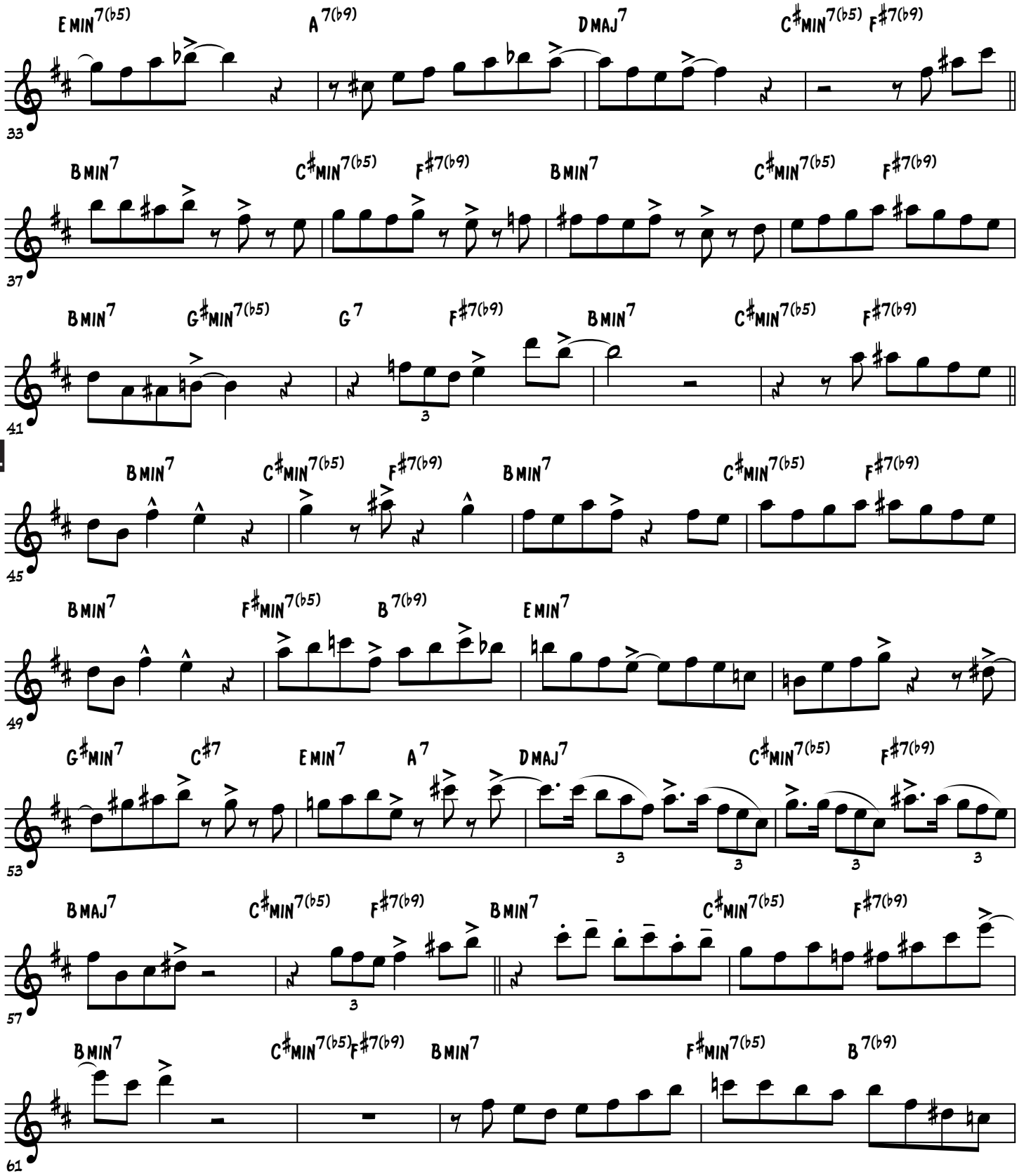

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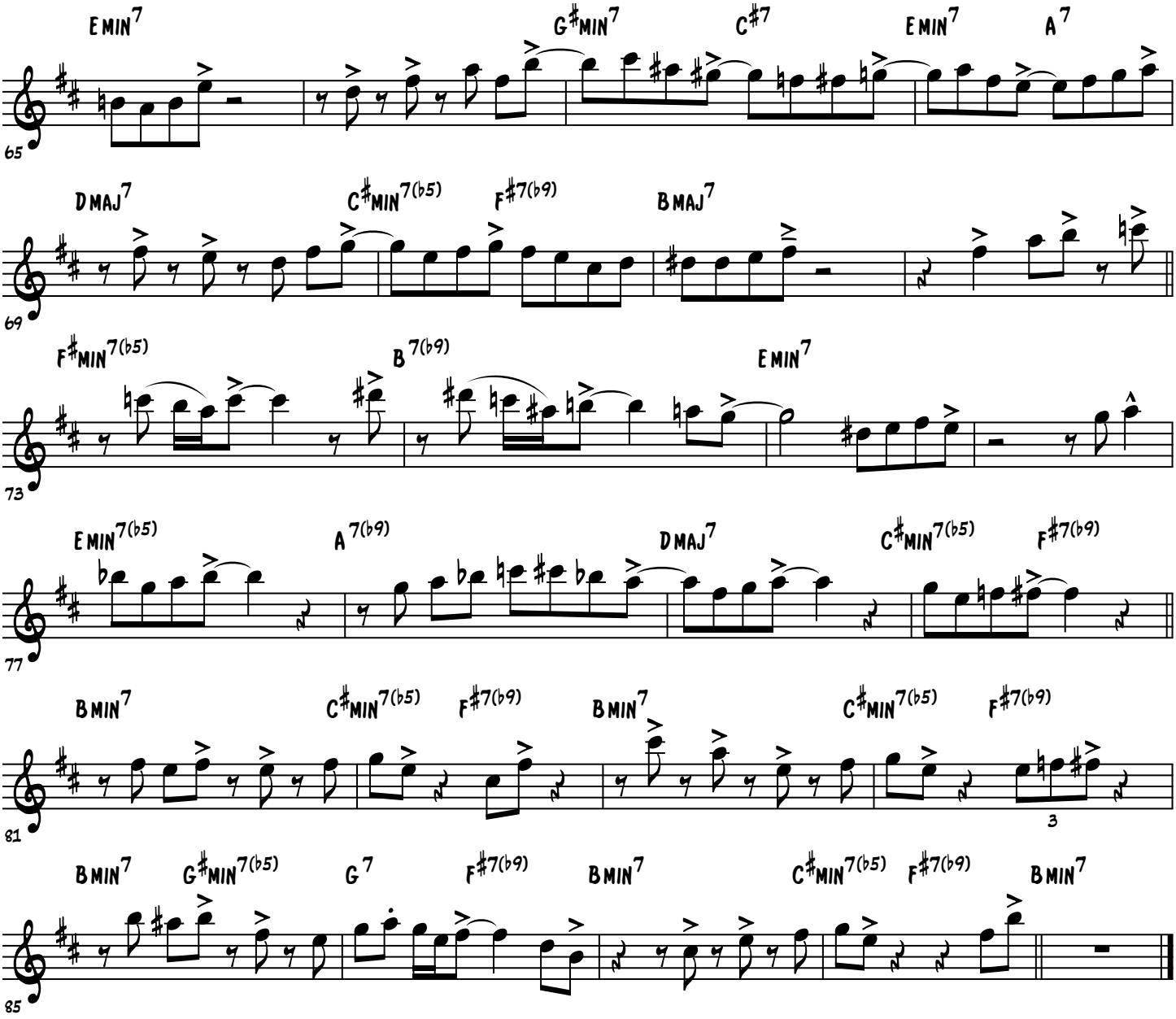

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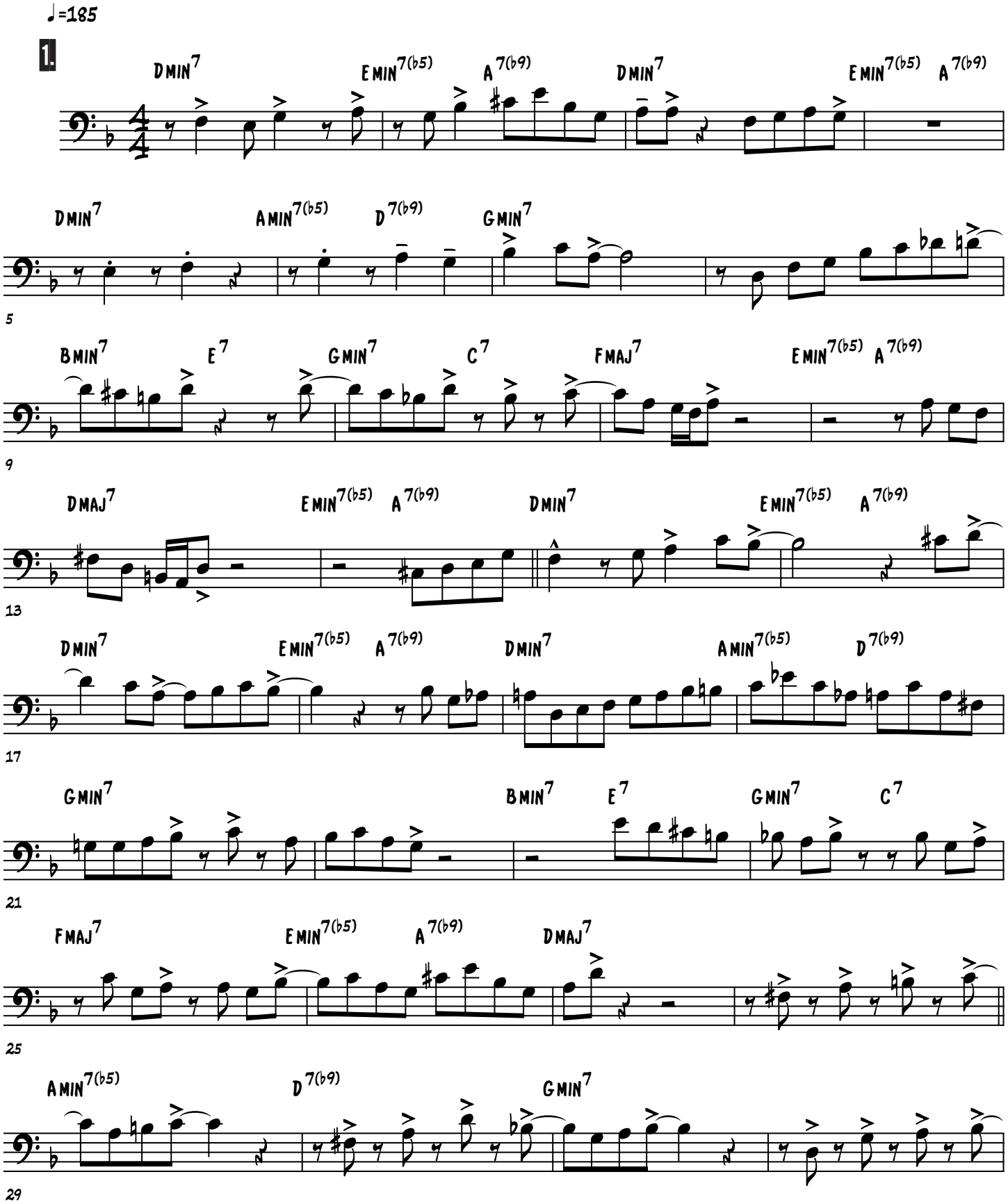

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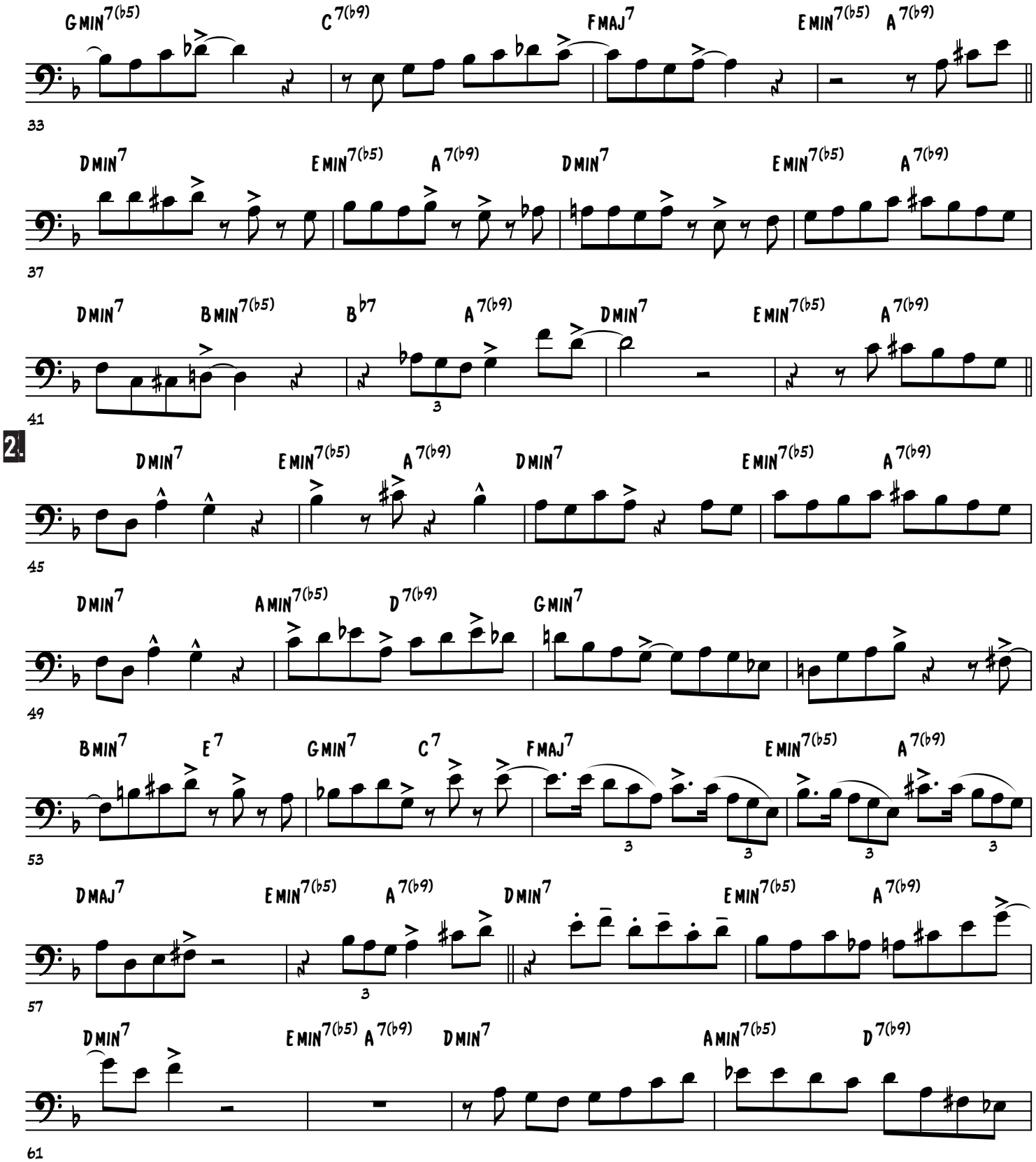

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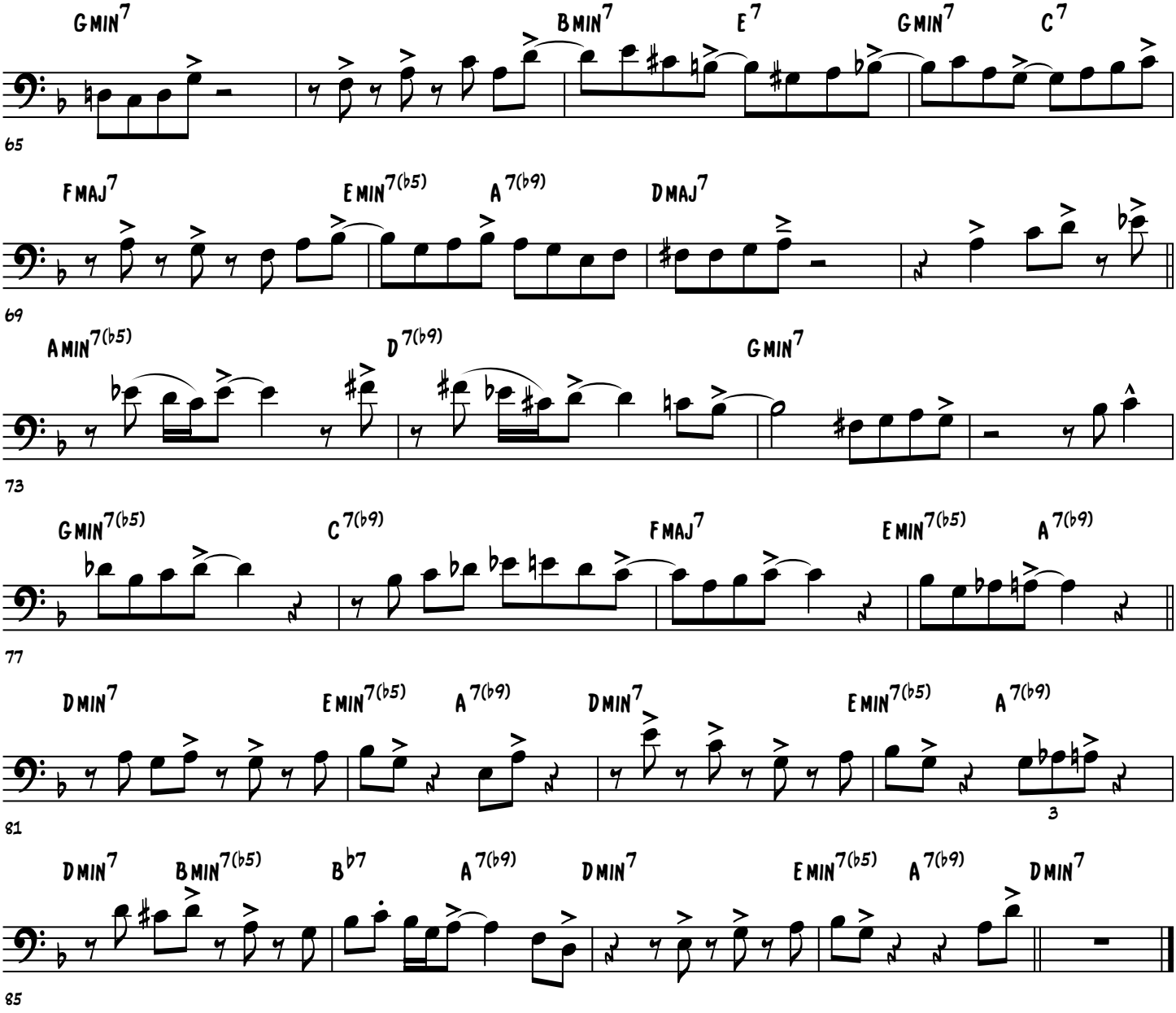

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Klobnak is a highly sought-after trumpet player, clinician, arranger, author and educator that resides in the Denver, Colorado area. Mr. Klobnak is also the author of *Targeting: Improvisation With Purpose,* which has been well reviewed by the *International Trumpet Guild* as well as many other notable musicians and educators across the globe. *Targeting: Improvisation With Purpose* has been sold in over 30 countries and has been translated into multiple languages.

For Booking Information-
Contact Jason Klobnak directly by email at jasonklobnak@hotmail.com or by phone at +1 (303) 829-1923 to schedule any events. You can also keep up-to-date by visiting his website at http://jasonklobnak.com.

BREAKING the monotony

If you are ready to break out of your rhythmic rut and go beyond your current plateau of playing, then *Breaking the Monotony* is for you! *Breaking the Monotony* will unveil some of the different ways you can energize your improvisations with rhythmic and conceptual ideas that help 'break the monotony' of the continuous eighth-note line.

Each chapter will unveil simple concepts that can influence your ideas to help you create a more effective and meaningful improvisation.

JASON KLOBNAK MUSIC

Author, clinician, arranger, educator and highly sought-after trumpet player, Jason Klobnak resides in the Denver, Colorado area.

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