From Coltrane to Bebop:

An Analysis of the Career and Playing of Steve Grossman

by

David Bernot

B.M., University of Denver, 2016

A Thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Colorado in partial fulfillment

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ABSTRACT

Bernot, David (M.M., Jazz Performance and Pedagogy)

From Coltrane to Bebop: An Analysis of the Career and Playing of Steve Grossman

Thesis directed by Dr. John Gunther

Steve Grossman was a tenor saxophonist often associated with the group of musicians who played together in the loft scene of New York City in the 1970's. He and his fellow jazz saxophonists invented a style of saxophone playing that was inspired by the playing of the late John Coltrane. This style would eventually come to be referred to by observers as a Post-Trane style. Following his career in New York, Grossman found inspiration in bebop and relocated to Europe to spend most of the remainder of his playing career in Italy. Through conversations with Grossman's colleagues, and analyses of improvisations over his career, this thesis will explore the unusual shift in musical focus exhibited by Steve Grossman.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Steve Grossman's name is one that has become synonymous with the group of tenor saxophonists coming up together in New York City in the 1970's who would play together and pull inspiration from a common denominator. That source of inspiration was none other than saxophonist John Coltrane, who's style in the 60's dumbfounded many young musicians and has continued to influence most young jazz saxophonists since his passing in 1967. Gene Perla recalls this quote from Elvin Jones, the drummer with John Coltrane's famous quartet, "After Coltrane, comes Grossman."[1]

While Grossman is not himself an emphasized artist in most jazz schools, his influence has certainly made an impression on the generation that closely follows him. Grossman's fiery style of playing in the 1970's, helped define the popular saxophone style of the decade, now known as Post-Trane. He is mostly known for his work with Miles Davis, and Elvin Jones early on in his career, which in some ways put himself following the footsteps of Coltrane.

Grossman's career spanned several decades past this period of the 70's, performing abroad in Europe and living primarily in the country of Italy. In Italy Grossman found himself providing a central role to the jazz scene as both a prominent player and inspiration to the young musicians on the scene. Some of these young musicians would even take lessons with Grossman. The recordings from his time in Europe involve a variety of different musicians from year to year, as opposed to his career in New York where he would play with a band for several years at a time. Grossman's move to Europe in the late

[1] Perla, Interview by David Bernot.

1970's, along with a sudden and drastic contrast in his approach to improvisation confused many of his peers. This pivot in style seems in some ways to be the reverse of many of the great improvisers that came before him. Strangely, Grossman's recorded playing took a heavy bebop influence immediately as he started playing in Europe, as though he had somehow decided to leave behind his life in New York entirely. It is this anomaly that inspired this study of the career and playing of Steve Grossman.

In this thesis, biographical information and solo transcription and analyses over the course of Steve Grossman's career will be presented in order to provide context to his musical progression. With this information, an attempt will be made to describe the development of his artistic voice over the years and make conjectures as to what factors may have contributed to this shift from a post-Tran style to a more bebop infused aesthetic.

In chapter II of this thesis, biographical information about Steve Grossman will be the topic of discussion. A substantial amount of this information was gathered through interviews with people who worked with Grossman over the years. These include Dave Liebman, Gene Perla, Gary Campbell, Michael Weiss, Giampaolo Ascolesce, Riccardo Fassi, and Damon Brown. Liebman, Perla and Campbell knew and played with Steve Grossman in bands while he lived in New York City. Weiss, Ascolesce, Fassi, and Brown, were all colleagues of Grossman later in his career playing with Grossman in various settings from recording sessions to international tours.

Dave Liebman is an esteemed saxophonist and jazz educator who met Steve Grossman in New York City and played with him in Elvin Jones's quartet in the early 1970's. It is Liebman's and Grossman's playing at this time that characterize the post-Trane style. Because of this Liebman is an absolutely necessary resource in regards to speaking of this style they invented together, inspired by the art of the late John Coltrane.

Gene Perla is a well known bass player, who currently teaches at the New School of Music and played with band leader and drummer Elvin Jones in the same band as Dave Liebman and Steve Grossman. Perla not only played with Grossman in this setting, but he also played in an original band with him and percussionist Don Alias, called Stone Alliance. Also Perla's playing is featured on both

Some Shapes to Come and *Terra Firma* which are the only albums under Grossman's name that were recorded before his relocation to Europe.

Gary Campbell currently teaches saxophone at the Florida International University, and is known as a participant of the same loft scene in which Grossman participated with Liebman and Perla. Campbell had very valuable information in regards to the types of music Grossman played at venues, other than what he is best known for playing with Miles Davis, Elvin Jones and Stone Alliance.

Michael Weiss is a pianist who has collaborated with a long list of many incredible jazz musicians and saxophonists including Steve Grossman and one of Thelonious Monk's famous saxophonists, Johnny Griffin. Weiss's interactions with Grossman are limited to his collaboration album with Griffin and an isolated jam session hosted by drummer Barry Altschul. This album with Johnny Griffin and Weiss, called *Take the D Train* is important because it is one of the last recorded albums of Grossman's playing.

Giampaolo Ascolesce is a drummer located in Italy who collaborated with Grossman on several albums. He was nice enough to answer my questions via email, because a phone call was not possible. Ascolesce and Riccardo Fassi also worked together on projects with Grossman including an album titled *Moon Train* which likely is the most original album put out under Grossman's name since *Terra Firma* in New York.

Riccardo Fassi is a pianist and big band composer from Italy also featured on the record *Moon Train*. It was incredible to see handwritten pieces from his folder which were in the pen of Steve Grossman himself. Additionally, Grossman is featured in Fassi's big band called Tankio on an album titled *II Principe.*

Damon Brown is a UK based trumpet player, who was at the time of the interview living in South Korea. His work with Grossman includes a recording, *This Time the Dream's On Me*, with the jointly named group, The Steve Grossman/Damon Brown Quintet. His relationship with Grossman was very close, to the point where Brown wrote an obituary for Grossman after he died.

In addition to these interviews, an academic paper about Grossman by Jonathan David Beckett titled “Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments that Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon” contributed a lot to this work. This paper was particularly helpful in gathering biographical information and was part of the inspiration to interview musicians who worked with Grossman, as Beckett did in his research. There will also be reference to interviews conducted with Steve Grossman and album information such as recording dates and locations.

CHAPTER II

STEVE GROSSMAN BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Steve Grossman's Early Life

Steve Grossman was born on January 18th in 1951 in Brooklyn, New York. His parents were named Rosalind and Irving. He also had two brothers Myles and Hal Grossman. In the third grade young Steve Grossman was excited to start playing the drums at school, however he was told that he couldn't because the school "didn't have any sticks left." Because of this his mother pushed young Steve Grossman to start on the alto saxophone like her own brother who was a professional saxophonist. With her mother and uncle being jazz fans, Steve Grossman was surrounded by jazz at a young age.[2]

Grossman's father was an RCA Corporation salesman which caused their family to move frequently when he was young. The Grossman family would end up spending the first half of the 1960's in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This is where Grossman's career as a working saxophonist started, initially playing with his brother Hal Grossman in a group called "The Uniques." This band also opened for the Duke Ellington Orchestra, and afterwards Grossman was apparently offered a spot in the band that he turned down.[3]

It seems that Hal Grossman, who became a professor at Berklee was a profound influence on Steve Grossman. Liebman recounts a story he heard where Hal Grossman essentially forced Steve Grossman to stay in the basement and practice until he could play transcriptions with recordings of Charlie Parker. He told his brother to "do this until you can get it done."[4] Steve Grossman himself refers to his early obsession with Parker in this quote,

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[2] Pace, *The Pace Report*.
[3] Beckett, "Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments That Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon." 5-6
[4] Beckett, On Saxophonist Steve Grossman with Dave Liebman.

> "When I was 10, 11. I started with Charlie Parker when I was about eight. I started to play alto saxophone then. I had an older brother [now deceased] and we started listening at about the same time. I guess it was through him and an uncle I had who got me my first records. I became a Bird freak."[5]

As a result of this Steve tended to not participate in sports with the neighbor kids. Steve Grossman's first experiences playing and learning jazz were largely because of his brother who introduced him to many older and more experienced jazz musicians from Pittsburgh including Eric Kloss, Tommy Turrentine, and Bernard Chambers. They also played together in countless jam sessions.[6]

Grossman continued to pick up influences from transcribing recordings of bebop saxophonists in his younger years. Gary Campbell mentions that he got to see a transcription book made by young Steve Grossman containing solos by the likes of Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins, and Jimmy Heath. (Campbell Int.) Jonathan Beckett also notes that Jackie McLean, an alto player who is considered to have a bright sound and fiery playing style, was an influence on Grossman in his early years.[7]

It was around the age of fourteen in 1965 that the Grossman family moved back to New York. This is where Steve ended up meeting musicians who were interested in emulating the sounds of John Coltrane's famous quartet. Larry Schubert, a pianist, Jimmy Sutherland, a drummer and bassist Lanny Fields who emulated the sounds of McCoy Tyner, Elvin Jones and Jimmy Garrison respectively. This may or may not be Grossman's first exposure to Coltrane, however this emulation would play heavily into his incredibly successful career in New York.

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[5] Gross, "Steve Grossman Article @ All About Jazz."
[6] Beckett, "Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments That Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon." 6
[7] Ibid. 7-8

Steve Grossman In New York

While Steve Grossman's professional playing started at a very young age in Pittsburgh, his career as an established musician really started in his late teens in New York City. Like many young jazz musicians living in New York City in the 1960's and 70's, Grossman was involved in what would be referred to as the loft scene. Jam sessions were hosted daily in artist lofts which were repurposed factory lofts that had been converted into studios for artists and could be rented for cheap. Jazz musicians would play at all hours in their lofts and live in them as well. Grossman was particularly known to play in the lofts of Dave Liebman and Gene Perla. It was at these lofts that many young musicians workshopped the creative, avant garde styles of improvisational jazz that were prevalent at the time.

During this period, Grossman played with Miles Davis, and Elvin Jones, two bandleaders that have contributed to the legacies of many famous saxophonists, most importantly, the legacy of John Coltrane. It's because of this, and the influence that Coltrane's playing had on nearly every saxophonist's early career associated with the loft sessions, that Grossman and his colleagues are considered to be a school of post-Trane players. Some of the other well known post-Trane players include Dave Liebman, Bob Berg, Michael Brecker, Bob Mintzer and many others involved in this period. While it cannot be known for sure how Coltrane's saxophone playing would evolve had he lived longer, this group of young tenor saxophonists in New York might be considered the closest thing to an extension of Coltrane's legacy.

Grossman's relationships and interactions with musicians in the mid to late 1960's are integral to the inception of his signature style that emerged in Miles Davis' and Elvin Jones' band in the 70's. Based on the accounts of Dave Liebman and Gene Perla, it would seem that Grossman started to jam on the loft scene by the late 60's. Dave Liebman, who recalls meeting Grossman around 1967 or 1968, first met Grossman on an army base jam session in Staten Island. [8] Pianist Mike Garson and friend of Dave

[8] Liebman, Interview by David Bernot.

Liebman's, played in an army band and would host jam sessions on the army base that had somehow involved Grossman before Liebman had ever attended. Impressed with the prodigious level of Grossman's playing, Garson was convinced that Liebman should meet and play with the young player.[9]

When Liebman and Grossman first met, they apparently didn't like each other very much. Liebman perceived Grossman as arrogant, and also admits to being somewhat jealous of the young talent. While Liebman had been dedicated to studying the art form on his own for years, without any formal instruction, Grossman who was 5 years Liebman's junior, seemed to be on another level at the time of their meeting.[10]

When Grossman met Liebman, he found that Grossman seemed to have moved on from being influenced by Charlie Parker, to that of an "Impressions" era Coltrane. This focus was shared by fellow loft session saxophonist Michael Brecker.[11] However, Liebman's interests were more in the avant garde recordings of Coltrane, like *Meditations.*

Though their interests in particular eras of Coltrane were not identical, Liebman realized that he and Grossman could use their differences to their advantage. Similarly to the later recordings of John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders, Liebman had come up with the idea that he and Grossman could be a great saxophone duo.[12]

Gene Perla's account of his introduction to Grossman of course differs slightly from Liebman's. Perla recalls meeting Grossman at a club or jam session in New York City. Perla made this statement of his first impression of Grossman, "[he was] Stoic. Somewhat withdrawn. Giving the vibe that he had his s*** together. That he was comfortable in himself."[13]

The focus of most loft jam sessions was free improvisation. Liebman's loft sessions would focus on rubato improvisations that were inspired by the late avant garde stylings of John Coltrane, while the

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[9] Beckett, On Saxophonist Steve Grossman with Dave Liebman.
[10] Liebman, Interview by David Bernot.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Perla, Interview by David Bernot.

sessions at Perla's loft would focus on improvising in time. The musicians would still play with no predetermined form or melody, however there would some groove and possibly an implied key center would be established.[14]

Out of this session style at Perla's loft, and the frequency of visits by Grossman and percussionist Don Alias, the band Stone Alliance was born in the mid-late 1970's. Perla also confirmed that three songs on Grossman's debut album as a leader *Some Shapes to Come* were a result of this spontaneous improvisation done in his own loft. Keyboardist Jan Hammer who was also featured on Grossman's first two albums was a roommate of Perla's during this time, which made Perla's loft sessions especially attractive to horn players.[15]

Gary Campbell also met Steve Grossman in 1968, at the loft owned by saxophonist Michael Brecker at the time. Campbell was able to attest to the natures of these jam sessions, and the "very out" qualities of the music played. While Campbell clarified that all those involved were very much into replicating the styles of the booming Avant Garde movement popular at the time, he mentioned that during this time Grossman clearly had "the most depth" among their contemporaries. Campbell also mentioned that while he was aware of Grossman's apparent investment in studying the bebop players like Sonny Rollins and Charlie Parker, it was apparent that Grossman was modeling his style after Coltrane.[16]

In 1968 Grossman attended the Juilliard school of music in Manhattan. (West) Although not much is known or at least written about his time at Juilliard, it can be presumed that he did not graduate from the school. This is because Grossman was about to make some major strides in his career within the next year.

It was in 1969 that Grossman started to play with jazz trumpet player Miles Davis. Grossman was playing at a club which according to Beckett's paper may have actually been called "The Scene"[17] with a

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[14] Perla, Interview by David Bernot.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Campbell, Interview by David Bernot.
[17] Beckett, "Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments That Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon." 24

double quartet featuring Grossman and Dave Liebman on saxophone. George Cables (Piano), Lanny Fields (Bass), Dave Holland (Bass), Lenny White (Drums), and Bob Moses (Drums) made up the rest of the ensemble. Holland was already playing with Davis's band and White had played on the groundbreaking album *Bitches Brew.*[18] It is up to speculation which of these connections brought Miles Davis to this club and what date this gig actually happened, however it must have happened before Grossman's first recording session with Davis on November 19th, 1969. The tracks recorded on the session in 1969 would be released on the albums *Live/Evil* and *Big Fun* released in 1971 and 1974 respectively.[19]

Miles Davis was coming out of a period playing with what's known as his "Second Great Quintet" which included Wayne Shorter (Tenor Saxophone), Herbie Hancock (Piano), Ron Carter (Bass), and Tony Williams (Drums). This band recorded albums such as *E.S.P.*[20] and *Sorcerer* (Sorcerer). After this period, Davis became eager to participate in new popular genres of music leading into the 1970's. The band that played with Davis when Grossman joined the band was a collection of younger musicians including Jack DeJohnette, Chick Corea, and Dave Holland. Grossman replaced Wayne Shorter who had continued to play with Davis's live band up to this time.[21] Grossman was the youngest in this group, being merely eighteen years old when he joined in 1969. The second youngest member of this group being Dave Holland who was 23 at the time. Because of this Grossman at times felt inexperienced compared to his bandmates which "inhibited" his playing in this setting.[22]

It was common for Miles Davis to hire an eclectic group of musicians for his studio bands. . *Black Beauty:Miles at Fillmore West* does feature this band performing together with the addition of Airto Moreira on percussion.[23] One of the most talked about Miles Davis recordings featuring Steve

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[18] Davis, *Bitches Brew.*
[19] Beckett, "Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments That Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon." 25, Davis, Live/Evil, Davis, Big Fun.
[20] Davis, *E.S.P.*
[21] Beckett, "Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments That Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon." 27
[22] Ibid.
[23] Davis, *Black Beauty:Miles at Fillmore West.*

Grossman is Davis's *A Tribute to Jack Johnson* which featured only Grossman from this live band. However the rest of the band is featured on *The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions*. This LP released in 2003[24] is a collection of the full recording sessions from which the 1971 release originates.

Grossman mentioned in an interview that he was "fired" from Davis's band before August 18th, 1970, due to a difference in musical ideas.[25] Shortly after this stretch with Miles Davis, Grossman would join his colleagues Gene Perla and Dave Liebman, in playing with the Elvin Jones quartet.

Possibly the most representative recording of Grossman's post-Trane playing is that of *Live at the Lighthouse* recorded on September 9, 1972 at the Lighthouse Cafe in Hermosa Beach.[26] Gene Perla was the first to be offered a spot in the Elvin Jones band. In January 1971, after officially joining the band Perla made a resolution to get both Liebman and Grossman into the group. There were already two tenor players in Jones's band, Frank Foster and Joe Farrell. However, it didn't take long for Perla to complete his promise. It was January or February of 1971 that Liebman was called to sit in at Slugs with Elvin and his band at the time. Jones must have been impressed with Liebman, because after the late set, he asked Liebman to record with his band at Rudy Van Gelder's studio.[27] This session would end up being released as *Genesis* and feature the first recording of a Dave Liebman original composition titled "Slumber".

The circumstances for Grossman's entry to the band are not as clear, however his first confirmed appearance in the band appears to be the recording date for Elvin Jones's record *Merry Go Round*. Recorded on December 16th in 1971,[28] Steve Grossman joined the large saxophone-centric ensemble to record, officially bringing together the four instrumentalists that would record *Live at The Lighthouse*.

Live at the Lighthouse was recorded on September 9th, 1972.[29] According to Perla the music for Live at the Lighthouse was conceived and rehearsed during a two week residency in Ottawa Canada.

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[24] Davis, *The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions.*
[25] Beckett, "Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments That Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon." 30
[26] Jones, *Live at the Lighthouse.*
[27] Liebman, NEA Jazz Master 2011. 34-35
[28] Jones, *Merry Go Round.*
[29] Jones, *Live at the Lighthouse.*

Jones told the band they would use this residency as an opportunity to prepare new music for this session, and so they rehearsed the material almost every day, playing it live on the gig that night. [30]

Grossman stayed in Elvin Jones's band the longest, recording his last record with Jones in 1976. The album *The Main Force* did bring back Liebman, as well as Pat Labarbera and Frank Foster on saxophones, Albert Dailey on keyboard, Ryo Kawasaki on guitar, David Williams on bass, and Dave Johnson and Angel Allende on percussion.[31]

Grossman recorded two original records *Some Shapes to Come* recorded in September of 1973, and *Terra Firma* recorded in two sessions in 1975 and 1976.[32] *Some Shapes to Come* was by far the more influential record. Perla recalls Don Alias overhearing a conversation between Christian Mcbride and Matthew Garrison about *Some Shapes to Come*, where Mcbride asks Garrison whether he knows what the "bible" is. Garrison replies "Yeah. *Some Shapes to Come*." Both of these records however, are important in that they both feature original compositions of Grossman while he lived in New York. Being that Grossman was still playing with Elvin Jones at the time of recording *Some Shapes to Come*, his playing seems to be particularly Trane-like, especially with his harmonic approach to vamp playing, especially including his use of pentatonic scales.

Grossman's last major collaboration in New York, was with the band Stone Alliance. This band shared a connection, as the trio jammed many times together in Gene Perla's loft. It wasn't until the three members, Gene Perla, Don Alias and of course, Steve Grossman, had a meeting at Alias's mothers house, that they finally decided to be a band. The deal they struck was simple. Perla took care of the business. Alias led the band. And Grossman played the saxophone. And according to Perla, during these years with Stone Alliance, Grossman never failed to do his part in the band.[33]

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[30] Bernot, Interview with Gene Perla.
[31] Jones, *The Main Force.*
[32] Grossman, *Some Shapes to Come.* Grossman, *Terra Firma.*
[33] Bernot, Interview with Gene Perla

The iteration of this band existed for two years from 1975-1977.[34] They recorded six records together,[35] and went on many tours together including a six months long odyssey in South America starting in October of 1976 and ending in April of 1977. Perla had many incredible stories about the band's time in South America which was extended from an original timeline of 15 days, booked with the help of the US State Department.[36]

The end of Grossman's time with Stone Alliance, marks the beginning of his time in Europe, and a seemingly drastic style change in Grossman's music. Stone Alliance was apparently booked to play two weeks at the famous London jazz club Ronnie Scott's to end a Europe tour in 1977. The dates for this run were set to be October 17th-29th 1977. Unfortunately Grossman did not make this gig and Perla fired him. According to Perla, this was the start of Grossman's career in Europe, as he simply stayed abroad for years and moved his entire playing career to Italy for several decades.

[34] Beckett, "Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments That Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon." 41
[35] Beckett, "Steve Grossman: Foundations and Environments That Contributed to the Making of a Jazz Tenor Saxophone Icon." 42
[36] Bernot, Interview with Gene Perla

Steve Grossman In Europe Through End Of Life

Grossman lived in Europe, primarily in Italy throughout the rest of his career.[37] Steve Grossman apparently did not exactly "move" to Europe in the traditional sense. He had for some reason chosen to stay in Europe after being fired from Stone Alliance in 1977. It is not apparent as to where Grossman lived for the beginning of his career in Europe. His first album recorded in Europe was recorded in France in January 1978.[38] The album was called *New Moon* and was a duo recording with bass player Jean-Francois Jenny Clark who was a famous French bass player, but other than being a potential label set up, it is not certain how this collaboration came to be.

Way Out East is probably one of the most influential records Grossman put out while living in Europe. This would be the first of several albums Grossman would record at Red Records. The record was tracked in Italy in 1984 and featured the playing of Juini Booth and Joe Chambers. The name is a fairly obvious play on the name of Sonny Rollins's influential recording *Way Out West* recorded in 1957,[39] as well as an acknowledgment of Grossman's move to Europe from New York. Grossman's playing is also inspired by Rollins, on *Way Out East* having made a few changes to his playing style. For example, he was playing with a much darker sound, and his melodic and harmonic language had moved more into a bebop vein, as opposed to the pentatonic language he was using on the music he recorded in New York. This aspect will be presented in greater depth in the solo transcription analysis section of this thesis.

Riccardo Fassi met Grossman in a town nearby Rome called Latina. Fassi asserted that this would be pretty close to 1988, and Fassi set out to Latina in order to meet and play with Grossman. He met Grossman at a club in Latina called Bird Lives where they ended up playing a weekly gig there joined by

[37] Brown, TRIBUTE: Steve Grossman (1951-2020) by Damon Brown – News, reviews, features and comment from the London jazz scene and beyond.
[38] Grossman, *New Moon*
[39] Rollins, *Way Out West*

Giampaolo Ascolesce on drums. This trio plus Massimo Moriconi on bass[40] played on Grossman's record *Moon Train* recorded in 1990.[41]

Fassi worked closely with Grossman closely during his time in Latina. He mentioned that Grossman would excitedly write down tunes Fassi had never heard before to play on their residency. He mentioned that they would practice tunes together often. He believed that Grossman truly enjoyed to play in the bebop style, as it was a style that he could be truly spontaneous within.[42]

Fassi featured Grossman on his original big band record *Il Principe* recorded in 1989. He said that he was able to play at length with Grossman until 1996, which was when Grossman moved to Bologna. Once Grossman moved to Bologna, apparently Fassi would still play with Grossman occasionally up until 2006.[43]

Michael Weiss, played with Grossman on an album featuring saxophonist Johnny Griffin. This album, called *Take the "D" Train*, was recorded in 2000 in Canada and featured the playing of Pierre Michelot on bass and Alvin Queen on drums. Weiss was a regular member of Griffin's band at the time, and contributed at tune to the session called "Power Station." Overall, Weiss's experience with Grossman wasn't particularly close, however, he acknowledged a level of intimidation he experienced due to the raw energy Grossman played with. It certainly wasn't that Weiss was intimidated to play with Grossman, as he was no stranger to playing with high level saxophonists, however there apparently was an intimidating presence that came out when Grossman played, that was a drastic contrast from Grossman's personality.

Grossman also played a role as a mentor in Italy inspiring many young musicians.[44] Marco Pignataro who now teaches at the Berklee College of Music lived in Bologna and recalls Grossman living

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[40] Bernot, Interview with Riccardo Fassi
[41] Grossman, *Moon Train*
[42] Bernot, Interview with Riccardo Fassi
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid

there around 1990, before Pignataro moved to Miami. He took one private lesson with Grossman where they spent most of their time talking about Charlie Parker.[45]

The majority of Grossman's recorded albums come from his in Europe. There are many more musicians who could share valuable information about this period of Grossman's life. While he apparently did visit New York City a few times, he only moved back to New York for the last five to six years of his life. Steve Grossman passed away in New York on August 13th, 2020.

[45] Bernot, Interview with Marco Pignataro

CHAPTER III

TRANSCRIPTION ANALYSES

Methods of Analyses

For the purpose of this thesis, four solos have been chosen for analysis. These four solos come from various albums across Grossman's discography. There will be no claim made that these are the most important solos of Grossman's body of work to study, however, these solos were selected in order to be able to determine what influences and ideas may have been more prevalent to Grossman in his later career when compared to his earlier career.

The albums these solos come from are *Some Shapes to Come* (1974), *Live at The Lighthouse* (1973), *Way Out East* (1984), and *Take The "D" Train* (2001).[46] The compositions on which Grossman improvises that will be studied consist of a freely improvised recording called "Extemporaneous Combustion," and three versions of a composition called "Taurus People" credited to trumpeter Farouq Dawud.

The reason "Extemporaneous Combustion" is included in the analysis section, among the other transcriptions which are exclusively over the same predetermined harmonic progression, is because it provides a less constricted setting for Grossman to demonstrate his improvisational concepts in the 70's. This concept of recording freely improvised music seems to be completely absent in his later recordings, however Grossman's time spent workshopping his craft in the lofts of New York consisted of mostly free improvisation. Gene Perla's loft session in particular was a popular location for improvisations that were free of preconceived form and melody, but instead propelled by groove and group interaction.[47] Because

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[46] Grossman, *Some Shapes to Come, Way Out East, Take The "D" Train,*
Jones, *Live at The Lighthouse*
[47] Bernot, Interview with Gene Perla

Grossman is not playing over a predetermined progression, inference can be made in regards to his improvisational concept at the time, without having to determine whether he is playing a set of notes to fit the harmony of the moment.

"Taurus People" as mentioned is a composition by a lesser known trumpet player Farouq Dawud. There is no clear distinction as to why Grossman recorded the tune on several albums under his own name. The form of the composition is based on a short sixteen measure theme which could be broken down further to two eight bar sections, of which the first utilizes a slower harmonic rhythm than the latter. This progression for the sixteen measure theme is repeated throughout the entirety of Grossman's improvisations on these tracks. Each recording of "Taurus People" was produced at least a decade apart from the last. Because of this, each solo represents a distinct collection of ideas being experimented with by Grossman.

As is presented in the biographical information section of my thesis, Grossman's career is often viewed as having two points: a Post-Trane period and a Sonny Rollins-like period. It is well documented that during his career in New York in the late 1960's and 70's, Grossman was widely influenced by recordings of mid and late life periods of John Coltrane. It is not as widely accepted which musical role models, if any, caused Grossman's change of playing in Europe from the 1980's onward. However, Sonny Rollins did have a distinct sound and approach to improvisational composition within the bebop vernacular, that reflects the approach of Grossman in his later period.

At all points of Grossman's recorded career, he was a very experienced player coming at his approach with a multitude of influences. Because of this, the analyzation techniques used intend to address characteristics of Coltrane and Rollins as the most apparent inspirations to Grossman's playing, and isolate which of these characteristics may be more or less prevalent in his solos.

In regards to the style of John Coltrane's playing, a thesis by Andrew Sugg titled "Tracking the Trane: Comparing Selected Improvisations of John Coltrane, Jerry Bergonzi and David Liebman" does an excellent job not only explaining the style of Coltrane, but how it has impacted some of the prominent players following his legacy. Sugg's paper goes highly in depth in analysis of the history of saxophone

influence, and in Chapter 2, Sugg focuses on Coltrane's playing during his modal period, the particular playing of Coltrane's that Grossman was notably interested in.[48] Another way to reference this period of Coltrane would be as Liebman likes to say "Impressions" era Coltrane, which predominantly speaks of Coltrane's playing on his album *Impressions,* and other albums recorded in a similar style, especially those with his famous quartet of Elvin Jones on drums, Jimmy Garrison on bass and McCoy Tyner on Piano.

In Sugg's writing he makes the assertion through a collection of sources that during his "Impressions" or "modal" period Coltrane was employing an improvisational language that he had developed on his own and which worked outside of the formulaic process of bebop, which he had been mastering up to this point of divergence around 1960.[49] There are characteristics that are indicative of this period according to Sugg's research of Lewis Porter's book *John Coltrane's Music of 1960:Jazz Improvisation as Composition,* and Gerhard Putschögl's article on, "John Coltrane und die Afromerikanishe Oraltradition (John Coltrane and the African American Oral Tradition)".[50] The analyses of Grossman's solos show a few of these characteristics prominently. The frequency with which he engages these techniques will represent the apparent influence of Coltrane on Grossman at the time of the recording.

The first of these techniques outlined by Sugg that will be observed in Grossman's solos is the use of pentatonic scales in his improvisations. Pentatonic scales are five note scales that have a long tradition in genres of music around the world, and Coltrane especially used these in his improvisations from his Impressions era. While a pentatonic scale can technically consist of any five notes within an octave, Grossman's use appears to revolve around a commonly used pentatonic scale which uses the intervals: root, major second, major third, perfect fifth, and the major sixth. This is considered by many to be a major pentatonic scale, which can easily be transformed into a minor pentatonic scale by starting the

[48] Sugg, Comparing Selected Improvisations of Coltrane, Jerry Bergonzi and David Liebman
[49] Ibid. (47-48)
[50] Ibid. (48)

scale on the major sixth interval. Whether or not a pentatonic scale will be viewed as major or minor will depend upon its harmonic context. Coltrane and Grossman used these scales as a way to not only outline the harmony, but also in order to introduce chromaticism by imposing pentatonic scales outside the key center.[51] Pentatonic scales that are transposed up or down by half step, can be referred to as "side-slipping."

Another effect widely popularized by Coltrane in jazz improvisation is the use of alternate fingerings for timbral effect. This technique has been compared by Coltrane scholar Putschögl with a religious phenomenon known as "speaking in tongues", and by Porter as "Breaking up long notes into repeated notes."[52] The technique itself as it pertains to the saxophone refers to a masterful use of the overtone series by using lower fingerings on the saxophone and isolating higher overtones in order to produce a unique sound quality, which in context can sound dissonant. When referring to this technique in Grossman's improvisations, the term will be referred to as either alternate fingerings or false fingerings, which are interchangeable.

Another aspect of Coltrane's playing that Sugg takes considerable time to explain and portray examples of is Coltrane's use of what Sugg calls "thirds-cycle vocabulary."[53] Coltrane and Grossman used this as a way to implement chromaticism in their improvisations. The concept essentially is to imply harmonies which transpose in descending major thirds. This technique was one that was explored at length by Coltrane, as is evident when looking at lead sheets to popular Coltrane compositions such as "Giant Steps" which moves between major key centers of B, G and Eb major.

A technique which is commonly used by Sonny Rollins is motivic development. Gunther Schuller writes about a Sonny Rollins solo on a Rollins composition "Blue 7" in his article "Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation." In the article Schuller breaks down the way Rollins takes an idea and develops it across an entire improvisation.

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[51] Sugg, Comparing Selected Improvisations of Coltrane, Jerry Bergonzi and David Liebman, 68
[52] Ibid. (49)
[53] Ibid. (62-66)

Finally the analyses of Grossman's solos will look at his use of bebop-style melodic construction to create melodies. Melodic construction is defined by accentuating the chord tones and extensions which match the harmony being implied by the improviser. While bebop melodies can consist of all notes that exist within the tonal center of a given chord, approach notes and enclosures can be used in order to add chromaticism in between beats. Ideally mostly chord tones exist on the beat, which chromatic notes are reserved for the offbeats. An approach note is typically a note outside of the key, which resolves by half step to a chord tone. An enclosure consists of notes that surround a targeted chord tone and would each resolve by half step. Because an enclosure consists of two or more notes, occasionally an enclosure will force a chromatic note onto a beat. Bebop melodies that employ approach tones and enclosures tend to consist mostly of eight note rhythms.

The provided solo transcriptions are transposed for Tenor Saxophone. The following sections will describe all analyzed pitches and harmony in transposed pitch for simplicity.

Extemporaneous Combustion

The track "Extemporaneous Combustion" from *Some Shapes to Come* is one of three group improvisations from the album. Grossman's entrance takes place a little after 3:40, which is directly after a keyboard solo by Jan Hammer, and continues to the end of the track.[54]

Since there is no set form to this selection, the analysis of Grossman's note choices will be heavily based on implied key centers, which are apparent when looking at Grossman's solo with a wider lens. From the beginning of his solo, Grossman's playing implies a key center of concert Bb major for the first eight measures before modulating to the key of Bb minor. In measure 33, the energy drops and the implied key seems to be F minor. For the most part, this holds true until the end of the song, however, Grossman uses a fair amount of chromaticism at various sections. Most notably, measures 85-92 exhibit a level of chromaticism that should be able to be analyzed with either "thirds-cycle vocabulary" or pentatonic sideslipping.

Before analyzing the harmonic approach to this freely improvised selection however, it is pertinent to look at a deliberate use of intervallic play which Grossman employs throughout the improvisation. Especially starting in measures 10-13, one can start to see a prominent use of the perfect fourth and major second intervals. Of course the notes played here also come from a concert Bb minor pentatonic, but the motive seems too strong to ignore. From measures 10-23, the intervals Grossman uses are almost all perfect fourths and major seconds. Once again we see this for a few measures in measures 31-33, however the groove change at measure 33 seems to inspire a development from this material. The material Grossman repeats and develops from measures 47- 60 also uses a majority of these particular intervals.

Grossman's use of alternate fingerings in this solo is surprisingly less prominent than expected. However there are a few instances of alternate fingerings worth mentioning. The only two examples of

[54] Bernot, Interview with Gene Perla

this are in measures 23 and 27. The example in measure 27 does a better job of representing the manner in which Coltrane tended to use this technique, by playing a flurry of notes with injected false fingerings to add a sense of dissonance.

In relation to the aforementioned implied key centers, Grossman uses chromaticism in the following measures: 44-45, 85-91 and 93-94. In measures 44-45 Grossman seems to be playing in the key of concert Gb major which has an interesting relationship to the surrounding implied key center of concert F minor. F minor and Gb major contain several common tones. Every note of the Gb major scale is played in these two measures except for the fourth scale degree, meaning if Grossman were thinking more in a Lydian mode, then every note of the F minor pentatonic would also be within this implied harmony.

Measures 85- 91 consist primarily of chromaticism within these incredibly fast flurries of notes. Starting in measure 86, it would appear that Grossman is now using side-slip from spelling a B diminished seventh chord,which transposes into a C diminished scale. In measure 87 Grossman appears to be playing in a G dominant sound overall with chromaticism between notes in the G mixolydian scale. On beat three he apparently uses a sharp eleven with the C# which can also be related back to the intervallic play that was analyzed earlier by using major second intervals. Grossman then repeats and displaces the end of the previous measure, to land on C# on the beat using this note as pivot into playing a C# minor pentatonic scale. On beat four of measure 88 Grossman moves to a D major sound. Grossman plays E major on beat two and A major on beat three of measure 89, landing on a high D# which in context sounds like a sharp eleven to the A major sound. The D# acts as another pivot note, as it serves as the dominant seventh of the F minor pentatonic which he moves to for about a beat. Beats three and four of measure 90 seem to imply the harmonies G7 and C7. The last beat of chromaticism appears to be the beat and a half of measure 91, where it appears to be the G7#11 leading back to the home of F minor pentatonic.

Measures 93-94 can be analyzed as Grossman using the chromatic scale in a way that notes of the F minor pentatonic end up on the beats of the measures. This is actually relatable to the definition of

bebop chromaticism, in that consonant intervals exist on the beat, with chromatic approach tones between resolutions.

For the most part this solo almost purely uses the tropes from Coltrane's modal language, however, it's important to note that there are sections that one could use motivic development to describe some of Grossman's melodic choices. For example, measures 47-60 are an excellent case of thematic improvisation, without use of sequences. This shows us that Grossman's sensibilities as an improviser are well developed even at a young age. In addition to this some of his implied harmony from 85-95, is clearly from a bebop idiom, however its implication over a vamp makes it sound completely different and unique.

"Taurus People" Version 1 From *Live at the Lighthouse*

The first transcription of "Taurus People" to be analyzed comes from *Live at the Lighthouse* recorded by the Elvin Jones Quartet in 1972.[55] Grossman takes the first solo, after a repeated statement of the melody (2 choruses) played with Dave Liebman. Grossman plays eight choruses of the song before passing off to Liebman distinctly with the last four measures of the melody.

As mentioned previously, the recordings from *Live at the Lighthouse* are representative of the Post-Trane sound. Because of this we'll be searching for more examples that are presented in the previous analysis of "Extemporaneous Combustion." In this situation Grossman is improvising over a repeated chord structure which gives another perspective to his melodic choices, as opposed to the "Extemporaneous Combustion" solo, which had no written form.

Similarly to his "Extemporaneous Combustion" improvisation Grossman uses fourths and whole step intervals. In this situation however, he does not seem to be using them as deliberately as he did in his free improvisation. Instead the use of fourths and whole steps are indicative of using pentatonic scales. The first instance of Grossman's use of pentatonic scales starts in measure 6. Grossman starts by using an A minor pentatonic scale over an F major seven chord. He continues to use an Ab major pentatonic over an Ab7 and an F# major pentatonic on an F#7 in measures 9 and 10 respectively. Neither of these examples particularly exemplify a use of pentatonic scales to introduce chromaticism, however, we do see this in measures 42 through 43. Grossman starts in measure 42 by playing a fragment of the F# major pentatonic over an F# dominant chord for five triplets. The chromaticism begins on the third triplet of beat two with what could be seen as a C major pentatonic, providing a tritone relationship to the original F#. Beat four of 42 and measure 43 represent a Bb major pentatonic scale which while chromatic to the F# dominant chord, creates a suspended sound on the C dominant chord in measure 43. Because the C major pentatonic fragment only consists of three notes, A, E and D, the C major pentatonic fragment can

[55] Jones, *Live at the Lighthouse*

also be viewed as a D major pentatonic. By replacing C major pentatonic with D major pentatonic the progression of pentatonic scales go from F#, to D, to Bb, which then implies a transposition by descending major thirds, an aspect of Coltrane's modal language suggested by Andrew Sugg. (Sugg, 61-68) Another clear use of Grossman using a pentatonic scale as a means to play notes that are outside of the key center can be found in measures 91 and 92, where Grossman faithfully sticks to playing an F# major pentatonic scale verbatim, which contains very few consonant tones to the C dominant, F dominant and G dominant seven chords played in this part of the form.

One borrowed Coltrane element that Grossman plays more with in this improvisation than he does in "Extemporaneous Combustion" is his use of alternate fingerings. Among all of the solos analyzed in this paper, by far this solo utilizes the most false fingerings. There are a few examples that are worth dissecting in order to see how Grossman uses this effect. These examples are in measures 26 and 27, measures 31 and 32, and measures 85 through 88.

In measures 26 and 27, Grossman's use of glossolalia are more timbrel than chromatic, as the notes that are perceived are within the harmony being played by the rhythm section. In measure 26, the notes that are produced via alternate fingerings are F#, C#, and G#, which are the root, fifth and natural ninth respectively to the F#7 chord played in this measure. In the following measures the alternate fingering A is the natural 6th to the C dominant chord.

The phrase in Measures 31 and 32, is much more chromatic than the previous example. This example is particularly effective, as Grossman takes an already chromatic eighth note phrase starting in measure 28 and adds false fingerings to build energy and complete the phrase. Generally Grossman is alternating back and forth between regular fingerings and alternate fingerings of notes within a major third range, which if played with normal fingerings would sound far less interesting. The build up of this entire phrase from measure 28, leads to a satisfying resolution in measure 33.

In measures 85 through 88 Grossman has stepped up his use of glossolalia by interjecting the effect into a highly chromatic phrase consisting of sweeping flurries from the high end to the low end of the tenor saxophone. His approach to the glossolalia effect is unique here, in that instead of interjecting a

note or two at a time using alternate fingerings, Grossman now is playing several notes in a row with alternate fingerings. This is likely due to the virtuosity required to play triplet and sixteenth note subdivisions at this tempo. It's possible that Grossman did not intend to move in and out of alternate fingerings here, as many of the alternate fingerings he uses are achieved by playing fingerings for other notes and manipulating the overtone series on the saxophone. This effect could be achieved by using a tight embouchure, and a high voicing on the saxophone, which will force some notes up the overtone series.

Grossman seems to have a generally more chromatic approach to this version of "Taurus People" than he does on *Way Out East* or on *Take the "D" Train*. Part of this approach may be due to the fact that with no chordal instrument, Grossman is less constrained by any harmony. In some instances where Grossman appears to be consciously playing against the harmony, it seems clear that he is playing with a melodic idea in another key. An example of this can be found in measure 70. Coming out of a held note in the altissimo register, Grossman seems to play in a way that could be analyzed either in the previous key of B minor, or reflecting an F augmented major sound with a raised eleventh. In the following measure Grossman outlines an Ab major sound over the F major harmony, creating a dissonant sound until he resolves in measure 72. In a similar fashion, Grossman takes a C# minor sound in measure 74 on an F#7 over the barline into a C7 chord resulting in the use of extensions including the flatted thirteenth and ninth, and the raised eleventh intervals. Measures 110 through 112 also display this method of implementing chromaticism, starting on beat three of 110, where Grossman appears to play in either F# or C# major, from the D7 and continuing over the A7, creating many colorful and dissonant harmonic sounds.

There are times when Grossman's studies of bebop influenced saxophonists is apparent. His most apparent use of bebop language tends to be on the F major seven chord which occurs in the 6th, 7th, and 8th measures of the recurring sixteen measure form. In Grossman's second chorus, measures 22 through 24, he utilizes enclosures and chromatic approach tones to accentuate the consonant intervals of the chord. Starting on the last eight note of measure 21, Grossman uses the upper note B and lower notes G

and G# to enclose A which is the major third in relation to F. Then starting in beat three of measure 22, he appears to be using what resembles a C bebop scale which provides a smooth resolution to the G on beat one of measure 23. He continues with notes from the F major scale until the offbeat of beat 4 in measure 23 where he plays a C# which is a chromatic approach tone to the C on beat one of measure 24, the fifth of F major.

On the F major chord in Grossman's penultimate chorus, he further reveals his bebop sensibilities through chromatic approaches and resolutions. In measure 102 he starts by holding a rather dissonant pitch, a D# which is either a raised thirteenth or a flatted seventh in relation to an F chord that should be supported with a major seventh. Of course while it sounds dissonant during his solo, the lack of chordal support, and intent behind his note choice makes the D# sound anything but wrong in this context. From here Grossman takes the and of two to play a C# which resolves by half step to the C, a much more consonant note choice, on beat three. Grossman plays a G# on the last eighth note of measure 102 to resolve to the ninth once again like his second chorus, and interestingly enough the following measure in 103 is identical to that of measure 23.

There are a few instances as well of lines resembling bebop language either in a different key from the supported harmony, or by resolving primarily to chord extensions. An example of this is found in the last four measures of Grossman's sixth chorus. The line starting on beat three of measure 93 utilizes the flatted thirteen Db and resembles a Db major sound for beats three and four. This sound while dissonant for the F dominant seven chord resolves by half step to a C or the natural thirteenth of Eb dominant sound starting in measure 94. From here, he uses the chromatic scale in a way that creates a micro resolution to the fifth of the Eb dominant seven chord on beat two. He then arrives at the D7 on beat three with a more dissonant interval of a raised eleventh. Finally Grossman finishes playing the chromatic scale on beat four by resolving to the third F# on beat four.

In addition to Grossman's note choices throughout this solo, his sound is particularly bright on this recording, even when compared to the freely improvised "Extemporaneous Combustion" solo from the same time period. This paired with Grossman's apparent use of several of the modal Coltrane devices

put forward in Sugg's research, reveals that Grossman is coming from an approach that is directly inspired by modal Coltrane. It should also be mentioned that this recording was recorded in a live setting, since every recording room provides its own set of variables to the sound of the recording, this could be a factor to the recorded sound of the ensemble. However, the Coltrane influence is evident at this point in his playing, as proved by both the "Extemporaneous Combustion" transcription and this "Taurus People" transcription from *Live At The Lighthouse*.

"Taurus People" Version 2 From *Way Out East*

Way Out East is one of the first albums featuring Steve Grossman after he left New York. The album was recorded in Italy in 1984 with drummer Joe Chambers and bassist Juini Booth.[56] The title is clearly a play on words referencing the Sonny Rollins recording "Way Out West" which also features a chord-less trio. Grossman takes a number of lengthy solos throughout the album as is demonstrated his breathtaking ten choruses on "Taurus People."

Interestingly, there are very few instances of the use of alternate fingering within this particular Grossman solo, even though he used them frequently in both of the previously analyzed solos. Those that do occur are less pronounced when compared to his use in the previous transcriptions. For example the single alternate fingering Grossman plays occurs his fifth chorus during measure 77. Ironically, though he has clearly de-emphasized alternate fingerings in his improvising, he has added alternate fingerings into his interpretation of the melody. He does this by employing alternate fingerings for consecutively repeated Eb's and Bb's in the 10th measure of the melody. He does this in both the opening melody and closing melody statements.

There are a few instances in this solo where Grossman employs pentatonic scales for his melodic content. One example is in Grossman's second chorus in measures 25 and 26, Grossman uses pentatonic scales based off of the root in these measures, and transposes the notes in measure 25 exactly a whole step down in measure 26. In the same chorus Grossman employs what is referred to as an altered pentatonic scale in measures 31 and 32. The scale is almost identical to an E major pentatonic scale, but with a flatted third G instead of the typical G# and works well over an A dominant harmony, including color tones such as the natural ninth and thirteenth as well as the third and dominant seventh. Another example can be found in Grossman's eighth chorus in measures 125 and 126. This is a particularly interesting use of the pentatonic scale, due to his persistence to play the Ab major pentatonic over three different

[56] Grossman, *Way Out East*

dominant chords. The resultant dissonant intervals over the harmony, contrasted by Grossman's melodic intent makes an incredibly colorful sound for these few measures.

There are many examples of Grossman using approach tones and enclosures from the bebop tradition of melodic construction. Once again Grossman uses the F major seven chord played in the 6th through 8th measures of the recurring form as a primary place to showcase his bebop sensibilities. Grossman plays a particular bebop phrase over this chord in multiple choruses, first stated in his second chorus in measures 22 and 23. The phrase starts on the major third A and descends diatonically to the major seventh E. From here Grossman plays a diatonic enclosure to resolve to the root by using the upper diatonic neighbor G and the lower neighbor E. From the F Grossman descends to the thirteenth D and takes a chromatic approach tone Db to resolve to the fifth of the chord before descending finally down to the root. Grossman uses this exact melodic phrase up to this point is verbatim in choruses three, five, and ten.

Another common location for Grossman to use bebop language is in the turnaround of the recurring form in bars 13 and 14. Starting in the first chorus Grossman starts by playing an enclosure in measure 13 of his solo to the fifth of the F dominant chord on beat three. Then starting on beat three of measure 14 he resolves chromatically from the thirteenth to the fifth on beat four of the same measure. Similarly during this turnaround in his second chorus in measures 29 and 30, Grossman uses a similar enclosure to the fifth of the F dominant harmony but up the octave this time. He then resolves by half step to the natural ninth of the Eb dominant chord on beat one of measure 30. Finally he employs a sort of odd enclosure into the sixth of the A dominant chord using Eb as the lower neighbor which fits neither harmony perfectly, and is a minor third away from the resolved note F#.

Finally in analyzing this particular Grossman solo, it's important to address his use of motivic development through his improvisation. One motif Grossman plays with throughout is a simple idea which consists of two eighth notes starting on the beat. The intervals between these notes vary, however the first use of this rhythmic motif appears in measures 5 through 9 and he is playing with primarily major and minor thirds. Then Grossman starts his second chorus with a return to this rhythm on beats one and

four. Measure 25 which is a phrase that has already been analyzed also represents this rhythm although with lengthened off-beats this time. The next time Grossman plays this rhythm deliberately seems to be throughout measures 82 to 86. Again he primarily uses descending major and minor thirds. A variation of this motif could be in measures 120 and 121, where the rhythm starts predictably and then is displaced.

Another rhythm motif Grossman reliably develops starts before his solo even begins with the last three notes of the melody in the 15th and 16th measures of the melody. In measure 1 of his solo Grossman repeats this rhythm which is a half note, followed by a dotted quarter, and finally a tied eighth note over the barline. In this instance Grossman even keeps some integrity to the contour of the melody statement, by descending from G# to E and then ascending to F#. He develops this by playing the same three notes in measure 4 with a slightly sped up rhythm. Rhythmically his third chorus replicates exactly the first three and a half measures of his improvisation from measures 33 to 36. Then, again Grossman starts his fourth chorus in measure 49 with the same rhythm and plays a version of the previously examined intervallic motif in measure 50. His fifth chorus starts with the same rhythm in measure 65 and he waits until the offbeat of one in measure 67 just as he would in his first and third choruses, however, this time he plays something different which is a surprising but welcomed deviance to the ear. In his final tenth chorus, Grossman returns to the exact rhythmic phrase played in choruses one and three with the addition of one eighth note on beat four of measure 145. The change makes the phrase feel only slightly different, and the return to this motif for his last chorus provides a feeling of conclusion to his improvisation.

Grossman's apparent focus on bebop and motivic development, while having deemphasized his use of alternate fingerings, and pentatonic scales indicate that his influences have changed toward an approach more like that of Sonny Rollins. This is not the most expected turn for Grossman's career, however according to his contemporaries in New York and in Italy, Grossman always had a deep and legitimate passion for the music he played. The next analysis will give insight as to whether this was another example of simple flirtation with an influence, or if his intent was to grow in this bebop direction.

"Taurus People" Version 3 From *Take the "D" Train*

The final solo that will be analyzed is from another recording of "Taurus People" this time from one of Grossman's last releases titled *Take the "D" Train*. Released on the Dreyfus label in 2001, the premise of this album is a collaboration with legendary tenor saxophonist Johnny Griffin. Michael Wiess on piano, Pierre Michelot on bass, and Alvin Queen on drums make up the rhythm section, making this the first and only "Taurus People" rendition examined in this paper which utilizes chord comping.[57] This could affect the choices made by Grossman as an improviser both harmonically and texturally, given the addition of a sound and harmonic material besides the bassline. His solo is also much shorter for this recording than the previous renditions. Grossman solos first for a mere three choruses before passing the baton to Johnny Griffin.

Interestingly, Grossman makes no discernable use of pentatonic scales in this entire improvisation. As far as alternate fingerings are concerned, Grossman utilizes these far less than any of the other solos analyzed. The only examples of alternate fingerings are in measures 1 through 4, measures 13 through 14 and in measures 21 through 24. However, all of these usages of this effect are much less pronounced than his usage of alternate fingerings in the other analyses.

In contrast to the mix of approaches with a slight emphasis on bebop observed in the last "Taurus People" analysis, this solo practically disregards his Trane influence evident in the previous recordings. Instead Grossman's use of motifs seems to be his primary concern in this improvisation, with some space filled in with his ability to create melodies in the bebop style. Grossman's first motif somewhat resembles the first motif analyzed in his *Way Out East* solo, consisting of on the beat eighth notes. In this case, Grossman seems to have taken this motif a step further by centering his melodies around a note that rises chromatically. In the first two measures, the first note of the eight note pairs is emphasized. We see G# on

[57] Grossman, *Take the "D" Train*

beat one rise to A on beat two, and then to A# on beat one of the following measure, finally leading to B on the and of two. Then in measures 2 and 3, Grossman goes back to his emphasis G# on beat four of measure 4 which rises to B by the last eighth note in measure 3. In the first four measures of his second chorus (m. 17-20), Grossman plays more with the idea of a central note that rises or falls chromatically. Grossman starts by revolving his melody around A# in measure 17. Then he takes the note and lowers it to A on beat two of measure 18, G# on beat four, back to A on beat two of the measure 19 and G# again on beat four. The whole time he uses C# to serve as sort of an upper pedal note, resolving each time to the chromatic line. In Grossman's last chorus we see a final development of this idea. This time starting in measure 33, he has removed the other notes, leaving space between just two chromatic notes A and A# creating a hemiola in three over four time finally resolving up to B in measure 38. A colorful choice producing a raised eleventh on the F major seven harmony.

Another motif Grossman seems to be playing with is a little less clear, but is a deliberate use of descending mostly stepwise motion with a faster subdivision than eighth notes. Grossman first hints at this in measure 6 on beats one and two. He then plays with this idea again staring on beat four of measure 14 going all the way to measure 17. Measure 27 uses this idea with a clear descending diminished scale. His final measure 48 also exhibits a mostly descending sixteenth note run which may be intentionally concluding this motivic development.

The majority of the rest of this particular Grossman solo comes from the bebop idiom both rhythmically and harmonically, although his use of chromatic approach tones or enclosures are less pronounced in this improvisation. We see an enclosure starting on beat four of measure 6, revolving around C played on beat one of measure 7. The following line although lacking these chromatic attributes still resembles more the style of bebop in its melodic construction due to Grossman's use of primarily consonant intervals on the beat. Similarly his eight note lines in measures 11 through 12, measures 21 through 24, measure 28, and measures 43 through 46 mostly adhere to this rule of melodic construction, with a few examples of chromatic enclosures or approach tones. In measure 12 Grossman implies F# major over an F7 chord, which highlights altered extensions flat and sharp nines. This set of pitches

smoothly transposes down a half step into beats three and four of measure 12. Halfway through measure 21 Grossman anticipates the F major seven by using a chromatic passing tone from the G to F. Then through measures 22 to 24 he plays exclusively within the key, while accentuating chord tones on the beat. Measure 28 displays an identical enclosure to the note C as we see in measures 6 and 7 starting on beat two. The last example starts in measure 43 where Grossman starts on C with a chromatic passing tone B leading to Bb and A. Measures 44 through 46 once again accentuate chord tones without the use of chromatic notes, although Grossman does highlight a sharp eleventh over G7 on the last eighth note of measure 44. In measures 45 and 46 Grossman takes a two beat idea using notes from triad based off of the root of the chord and transposes it through the F#7, F7, and Eb7 chords.

Although this is a much shorter solo to the previous analyses in this paper, it seems apparent that Grossman has abandoned much of his Trane influence from his early years. His focus seems to have moved almost entirely to motivic development in this improvisation, and away from any use of Coltrane “Impressions” era techniques.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

For this overview of Grossman's career and analysis of his improvisations, the original goal was to try to provide proof and reasoning for a shift in style and influence over the course of Steve Grossman's career that hasn't previously been addressed in writing. There is much potential to more thoroughly address this subject. For example, there are many more of Grosman's colleagues and students who could shed light on his musical approach. One could also select more of his improvisations to analyze, as such a small representation of his total work is accounted for here. Although there is no way to know for sure why Grossman's playing changed, the information collected in this thesis, does provide a basis to make some assumptions in regards to the evolution of his career.

The easiest initial objective to speak to is proof through analysis that Grossman had moved his influences over time from his debut recordings as a Post-Trane figure. This is clearly evident through the transcription analysis section, as his solos become more and more bebop influenced over time, and Grossman leaves behind his Coltrane inspired techniques. Even Grossman's sound which in his first recordings is brighter, and more reminiscent of Coltrane, gets darker and more thick like Sonny Rollins by the last two transcriptions examined. Harmonically and rhythmically Grossman's *Way Out East* and *Take the "D" Train* solos both lean heavily into his bebop sensibilities by demonstrating use of motivic development, and melodic construction with added chromaticism via enclosures and approach tones. The first influence that comes to mind when hearing this period of Grosssman, is certainly that of an early Sonny Rollins. It is also evident through the stories of Grossman's colleagues in New York, that his main influence was an Impressions or modal era John Coltrane, while his European cohorts can attest to Grossman's deep love for bebop, and especially Charlie Parker in his later career.

Unfortunately the alternate piece of the goal, to be able to come up with a reason why Steve Grossman would make such a change in approach is much trickier. There are many factors to consider,

but it is impossible to come up with a conclusive answer to this question. However we can look into some of the conditions surrounding Grossman before and after his transition to Europe and try to understand why he may have been susceptible to this change.

What's interesting to note, is that when Grossman started living in Europe, around 1977 contemporaries of Grossman had been playing on the historically less straight ahead and forward thinking record label ECM (Edition of Contemporary Music) located in Germany. With records like Dave Liebman's *Lookout Farm* recorded in 1973,[58] being put out it's a wonder why Grossman didn't continue to play the style of music he had developed in New York since this creative label was around and interested in putting out records by creative musicians from the States. It's also apparent that the ECM producer and founder, Manfred Eicher although located in Germany, was willing to record around the world with *Lookout Farm* being recorded in New York, and other ECM records like Pat Metheny's *Watercolors* which was recorded in Oslo, Norway in 1977.[59]

Without being able to ask Grossman himself, those who were around him may be able to shed some light on this. Many potential reasons were discussed by his colleagues that were interviewed. Gene Perla mentions that accessibility could have been a factor, as the musicians in Europe may have not been as interested in the Coltrane style like Grossman's circle in New York was. Even Grossman's Post-Trane counterpart Dave Liebman is dumbfounded by the major question about Steve Grossman's change in approach. "Why?" Liebman states, "He (Grossman) was... already, as I said, master of, you know he had Sonny Rollins down, had Bird down and all that. And after the Miles/Elvin era… He had obviously chosen to be an exponent of Bebop."[60]

Meanwhile Damon Brown recalls a Steve Grossman on tour that was excited to play his favorite songs and improvise spontaneously over the forms of standards. Riccardo Fassi tells of Grossman's excitement to write music for their album and practice standards together. He mentions that Grossman's

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[58] Liebman, *Lookout Farm*
[59] Metheny, *Watercolors*
[60] Bernot, Interview with Dave Liebman

playing was reliant on the music he played to an extent. For example, Grossman's tunes were more modal and Fassi stated that Grossman sounded different on these compositions, as opposed to the jazz standards that they would play.[61]

Marco Pignataro took a lesson with Steve Grossman so he was able to offer valuable insights into Grossman's values as a jazz musician. His most important piece of advice for Pignataro was to learn Charlie Parker bebop heads in all twelve keys. It could be that this focus on bebop is the main reason that his later recordings are so often related to Sonny Rollins. Pignataro also stresses that the 80's into the 90's marked a resurgence of bebop which was at least as prominent as modern jazz styles that were emerging.[62]

It's also important to look at Grossman's progression away from the view of possible influences, in order to take an attempt at describing why he might have decided to embrace bebop. While it seems logical to base his early career off of John Coltrane and his later career off of Sonny Rollins, there is a clearer progression in ideas from using techniques to propel his improvisation, to instead relying more on solo cohesiveness and developing a solo beginning to end. While Grossman does seem to drop the frequency of his use of alternate fingerings, pentatonic scales, and other Coltrane inspired techniques, his fast flurries of notes throughout his career in Europe still have an energy about them that are reminiscent of his past performances. It seems that initially Grossman used these techniques Coltrane introduced as a way to tie together his improvisations. However over the years, Grossman found new ways in order to achieve solos that were compositional in nature yet spontaneous. By using motivic development for example, his solos display more of an arc in the 80's and later, in contrast to his solo on *Live At The Lighthouse*. His ideas from chorus to chorus seem to be more connected. In general his solo on *Extemporaneous Combustion also* feels more cohesive in this regard, which could be due to the free nature of the group improvisation, however the types ideas which he develops appear to be very different. Damon Brown and Riccardo Fassi both recognize that Grossman loved to play tunes he had played many

[61] Bernot, Interview with Riccardo Fassi
[62] Bernot, Interview with Marco Pignataro

times before. The more he played these tunes, in this bebop style, the more free he may have felt to create melodies spontaneously.[63]

Hopefully the work presented in this thesis will inspire scholars to study more of Grossman's playing and his career. Perhaps the analyses can also inspire other musicians to attempt to assimilate some of Steve Grossman's ideas into their own improvisational styles. Educators who are unaware of Grossman and his playing before reading this thesis could be motivated to present information about him to their saxophone and jazz students. There is much to be learned through Grossman and his legacy, about the practice of jazz music.

[63] Bernot, Interview with Damon Brown. Bernot, Interview with Riccardo Fassi.

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APPENDIX A

FULL SOLO TRANSCRIPTIONS

Steve Grossman Solo Transcription On

Extemporaneous Combustion

Transposed for Bb Tenor Saxophone

Starts at 3:40

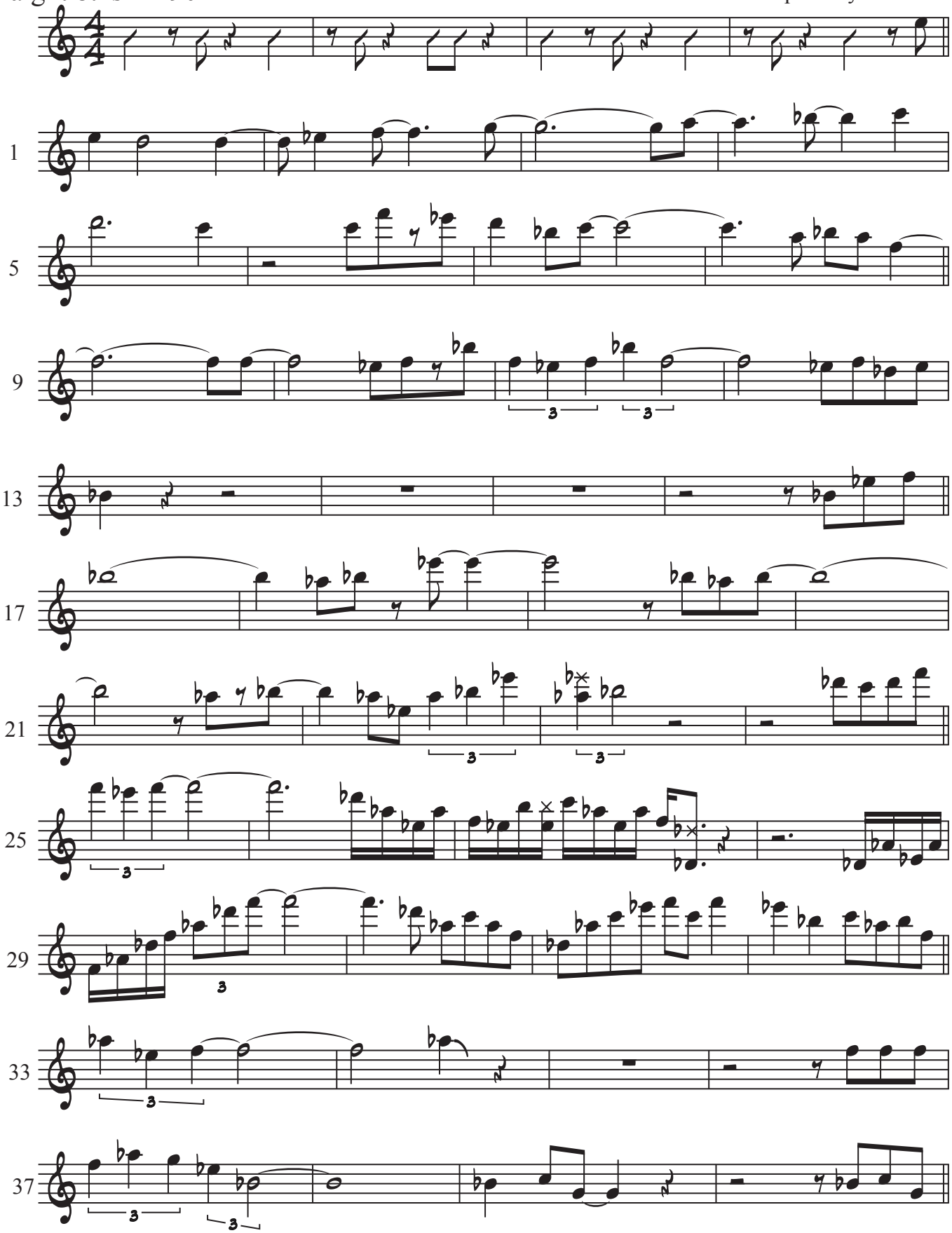
Straight 8ths ♩=190

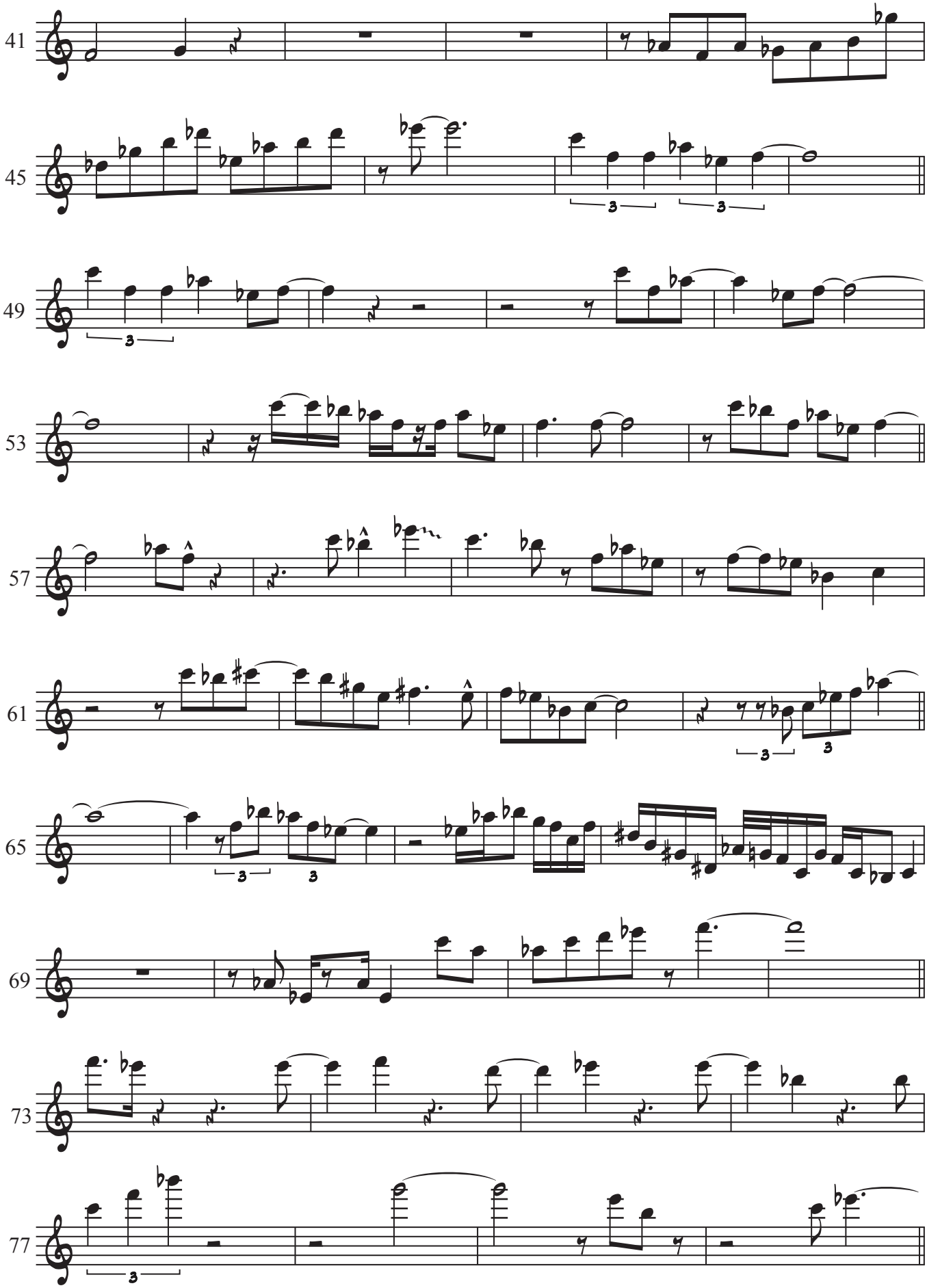
From The Album *Some Shapes To Come*

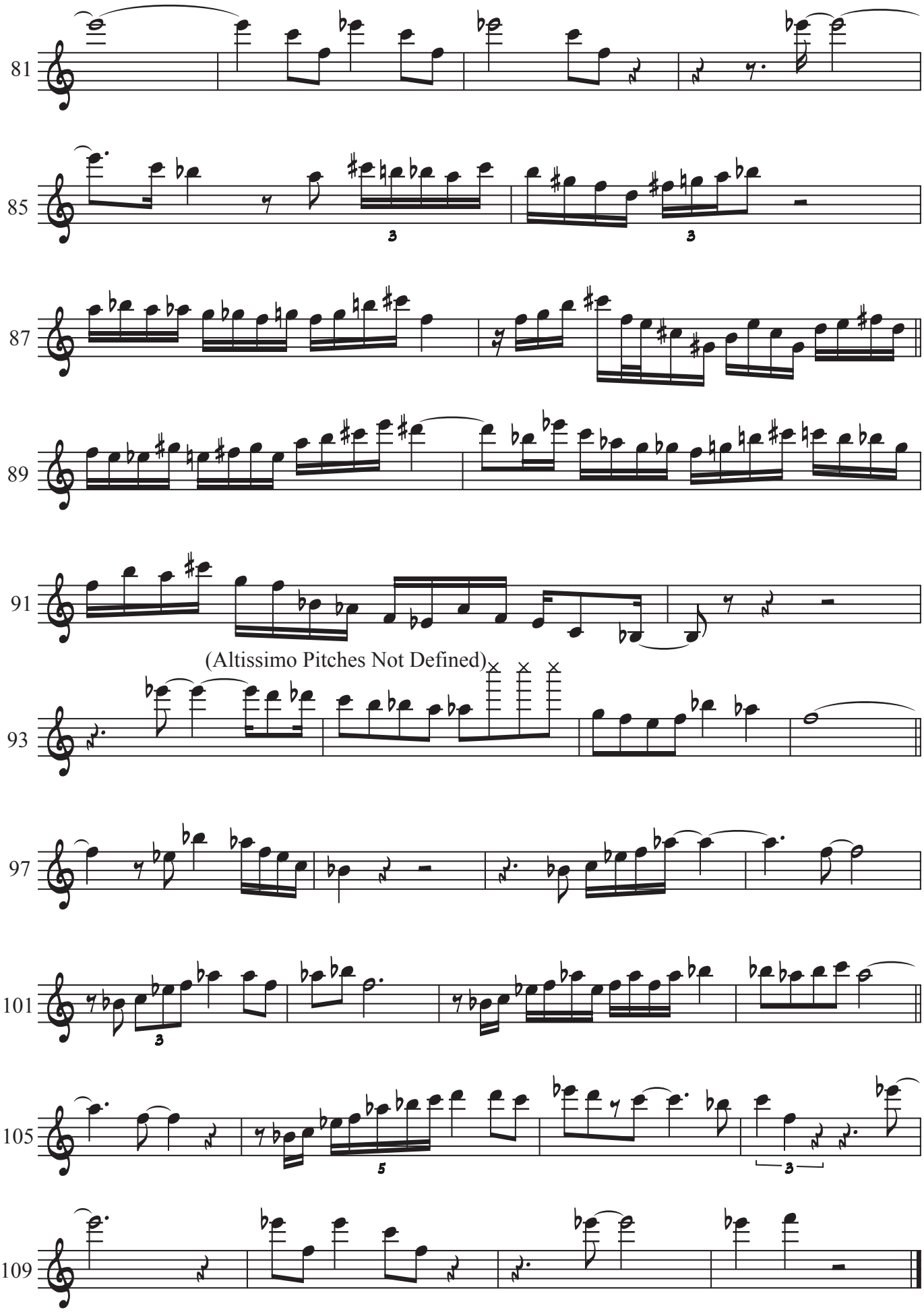
Released 1974 On PM Records

Steve Grossman

Transcription by David Bernot




41
45
49
53
57
61
65
69
73
77


81
85
87
89
91
(Altissimo Pitches Not Defined)
93
97
101
105
109

Steve Grossman Solo Transcription On

Taurus People

Transposed for Bb Tenor Saxophone

Starts At 0:28

Uptempo Swing ♩= 190

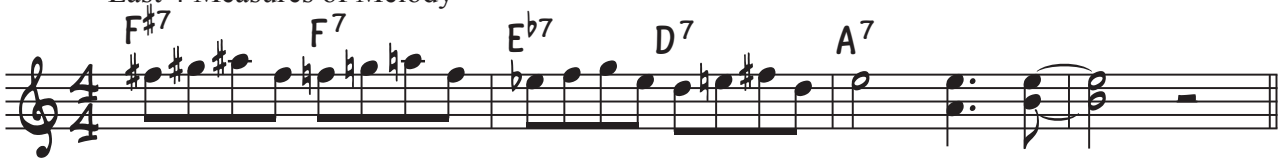
From The Album *Live At The Lighthouse*

Released 1973 On Blue Note Records

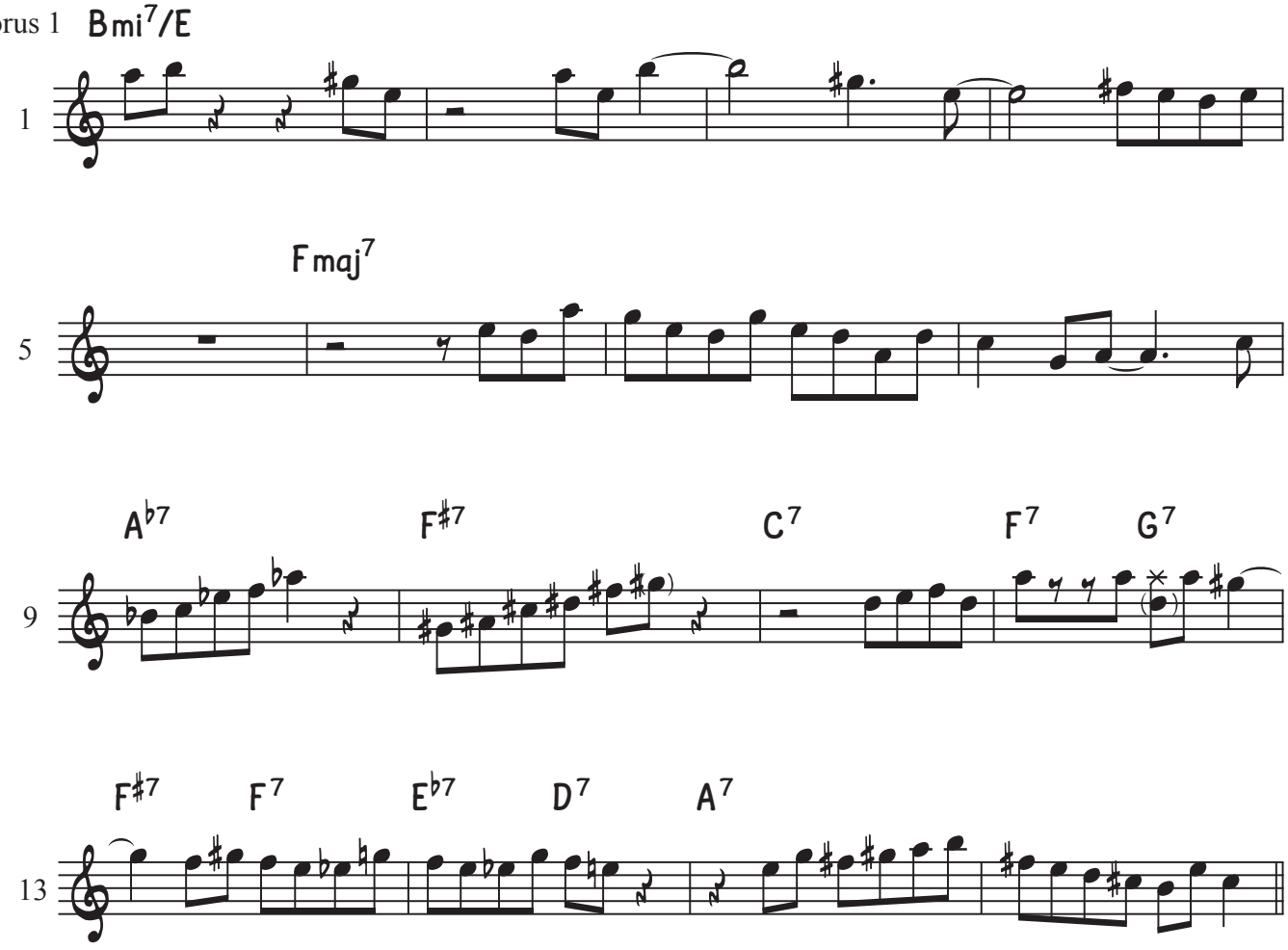
Farouq Dawud

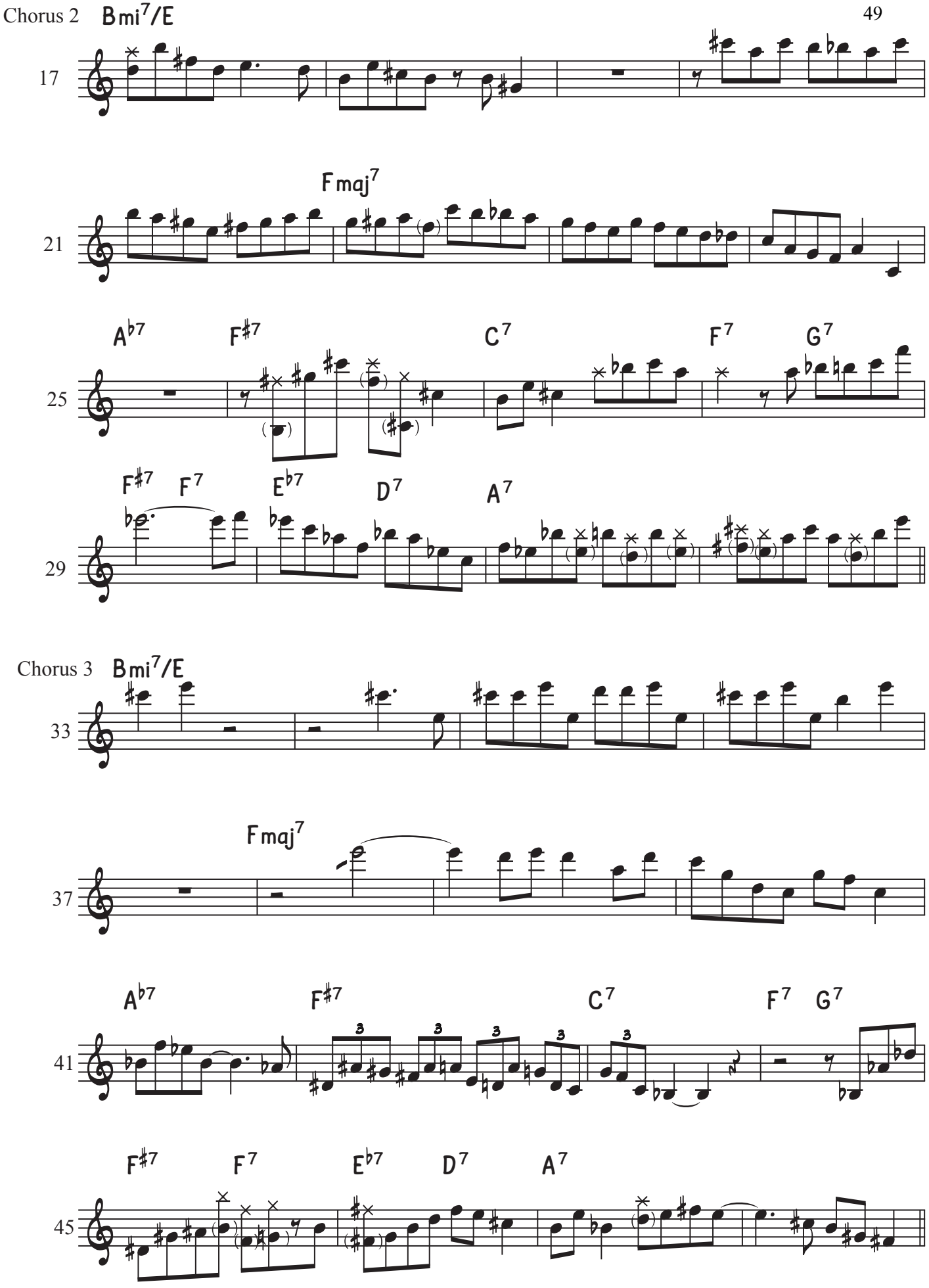
Transcription by David Bernot

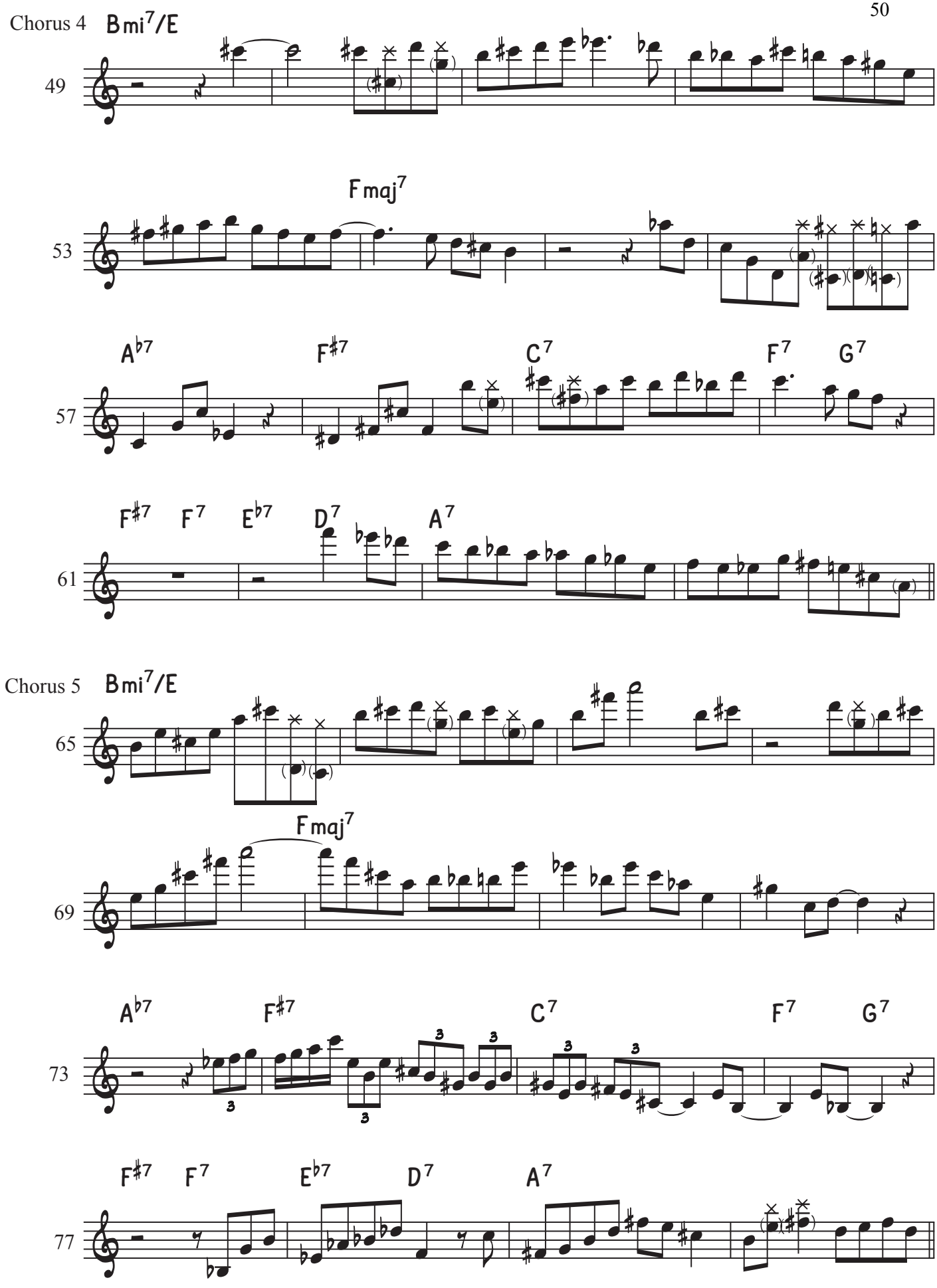
Last 4 Measures of Melody



Chorus 1




Chorus 2
Bmi7/E
17
Fmaj7
21
Ab7
F#7
C7
F7
G7
25
F#7
F7
Eb7
D7
A7
29
Chorus 3
Bmi7/E
33
Fmaj7
37
Ab7
F#7
C7
F7
G7
41
F#7
F7
Eb7
D7
A7
45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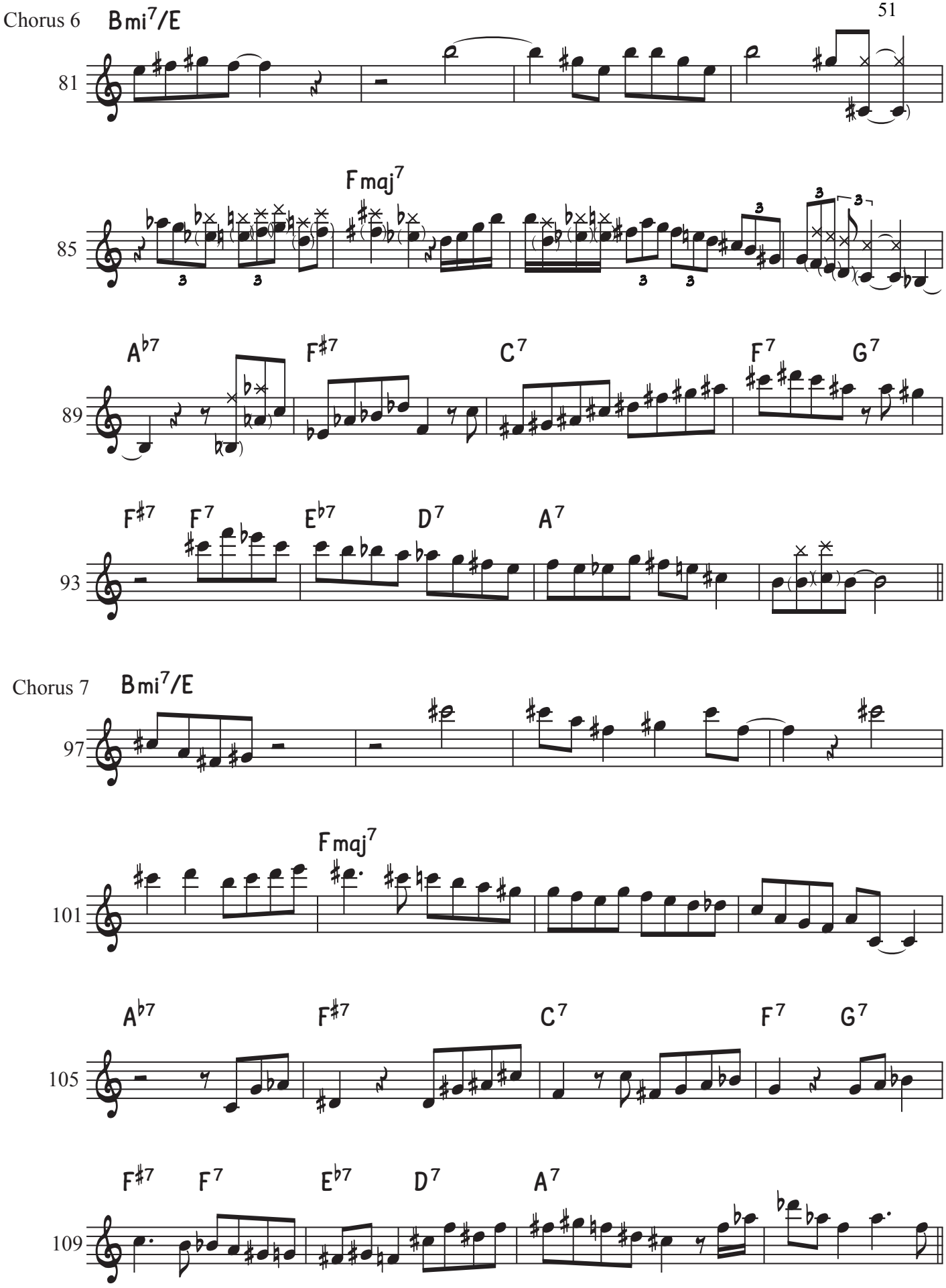
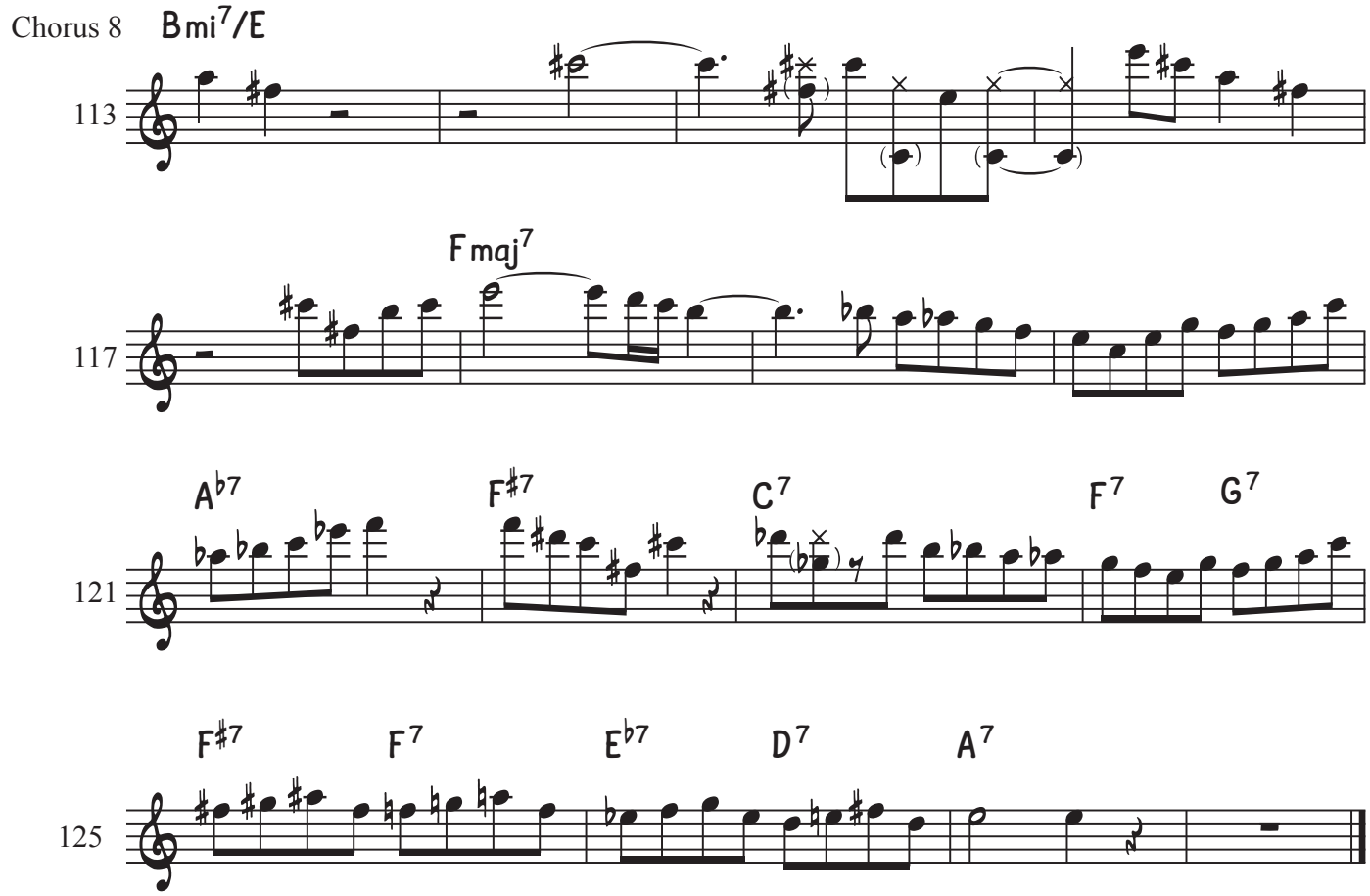
Bmi7/E
49
Fmaj7
53
Ab7
F#7
C7
F7
G7
57
F#7
F7
Eb7
D7
A7
61
Chorus 5
Bmi7/E
65
Fmaj7
69
Ab7
F#7
C7
F7
G7
73
F#7
F7
Eb7
D7
A7
77


Chorus 6
Bmi7/E
81
Fmaj7
85
A♭7
F♯7
C7
F7
G7
89
F♯7
F7
E♭7
D7
A7
93
Chorus 7
Bmi7/E
97
Fmaj7
101
A♭7
F♯7
C7
F7
G7
105
F♯7
F7
E♭7
D7
A7
109


Chorus 8
Bmi7/E
113
Fmaj7
117
Ab7
F#7
C7
F7
G7
121
F#7
F7
Eb7
D7
A7
125

Steve Grossman Solo Transcription On

Taurus People

From the Album *Way Out East*

Farouq Dawud

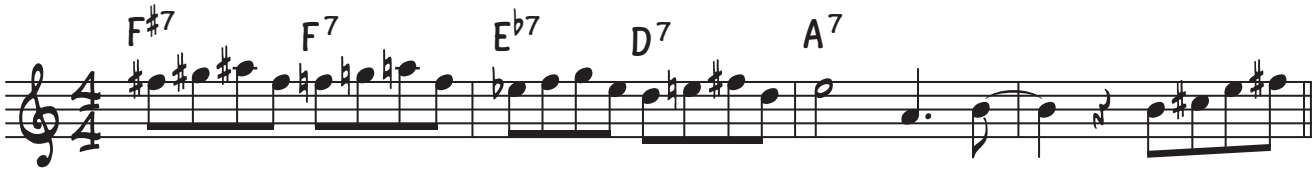
Transcription by David Bernot

Transposed for Bb Tenor Saxophone

Starts at 0:35

Uptempo Swing ♩= 240

Last 4 Measures of Melody



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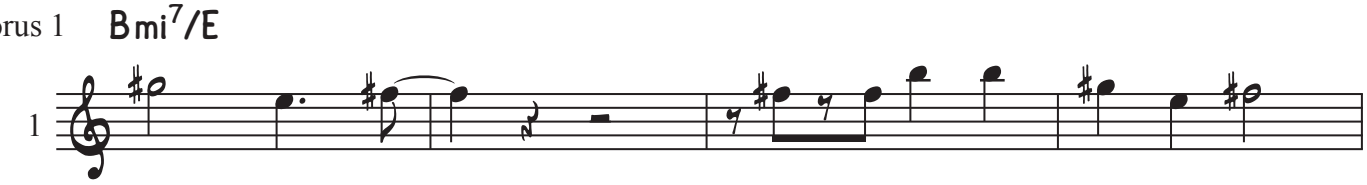
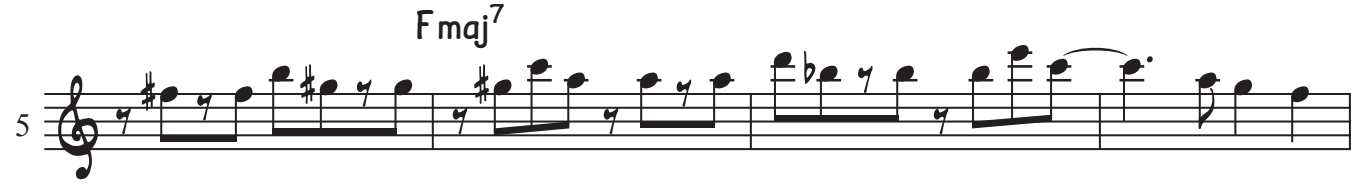
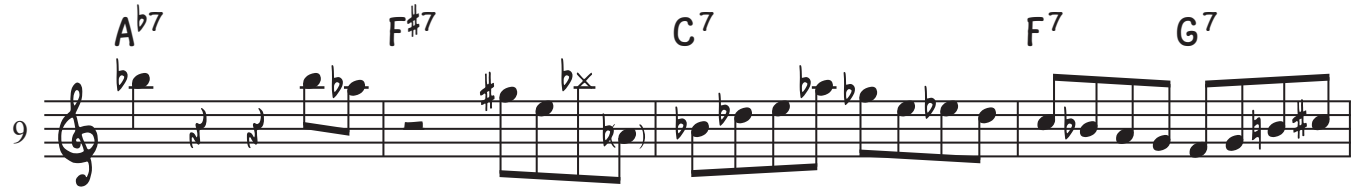
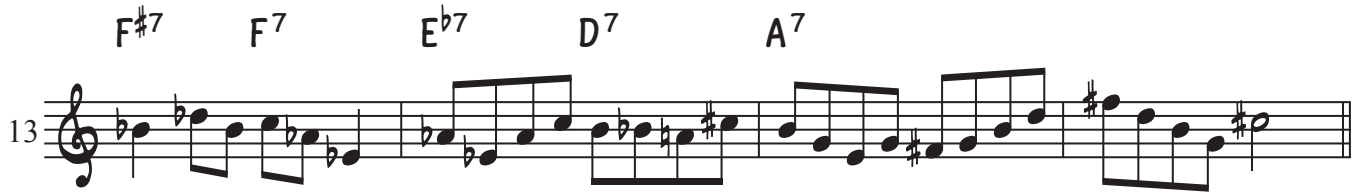
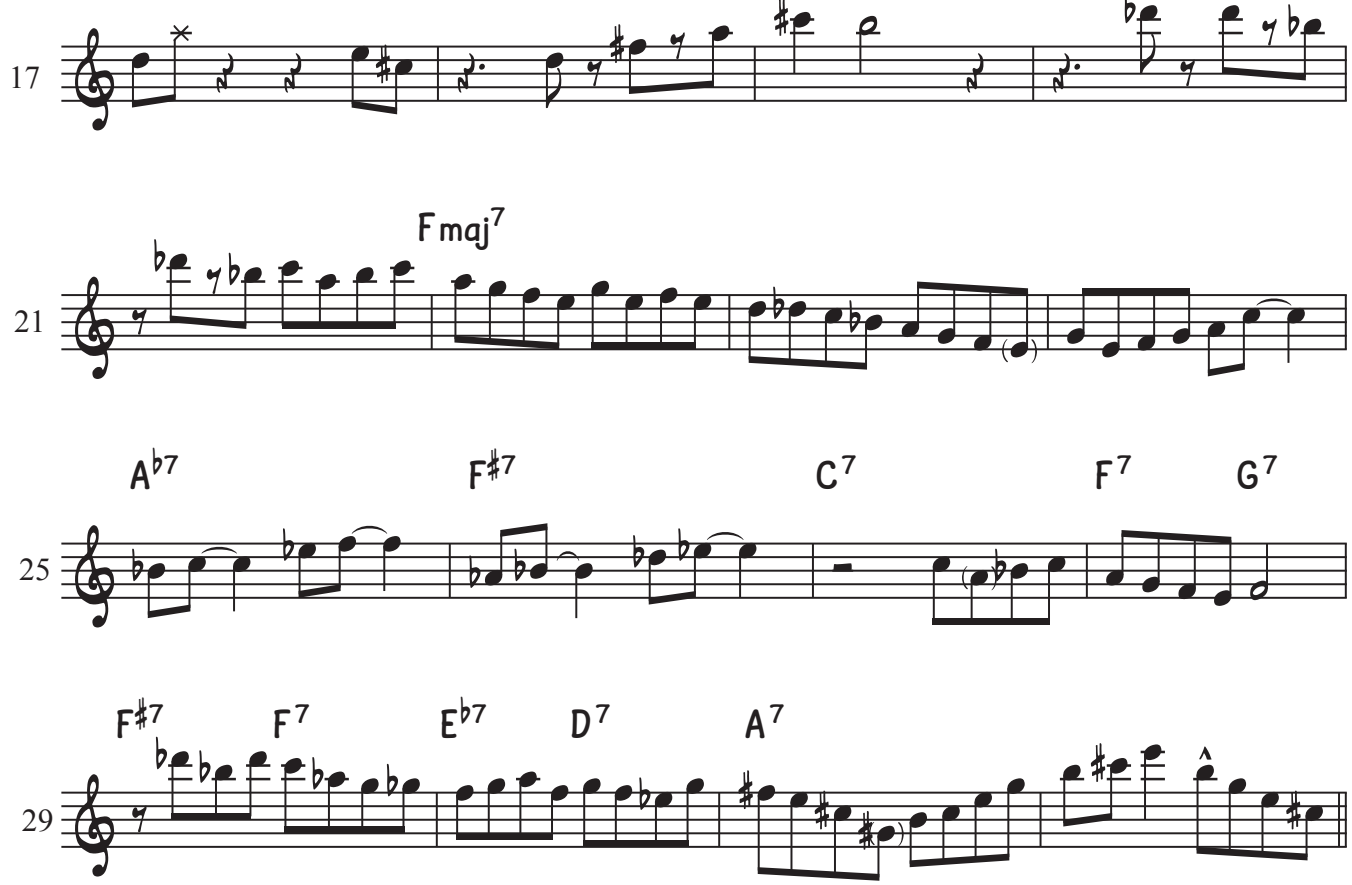




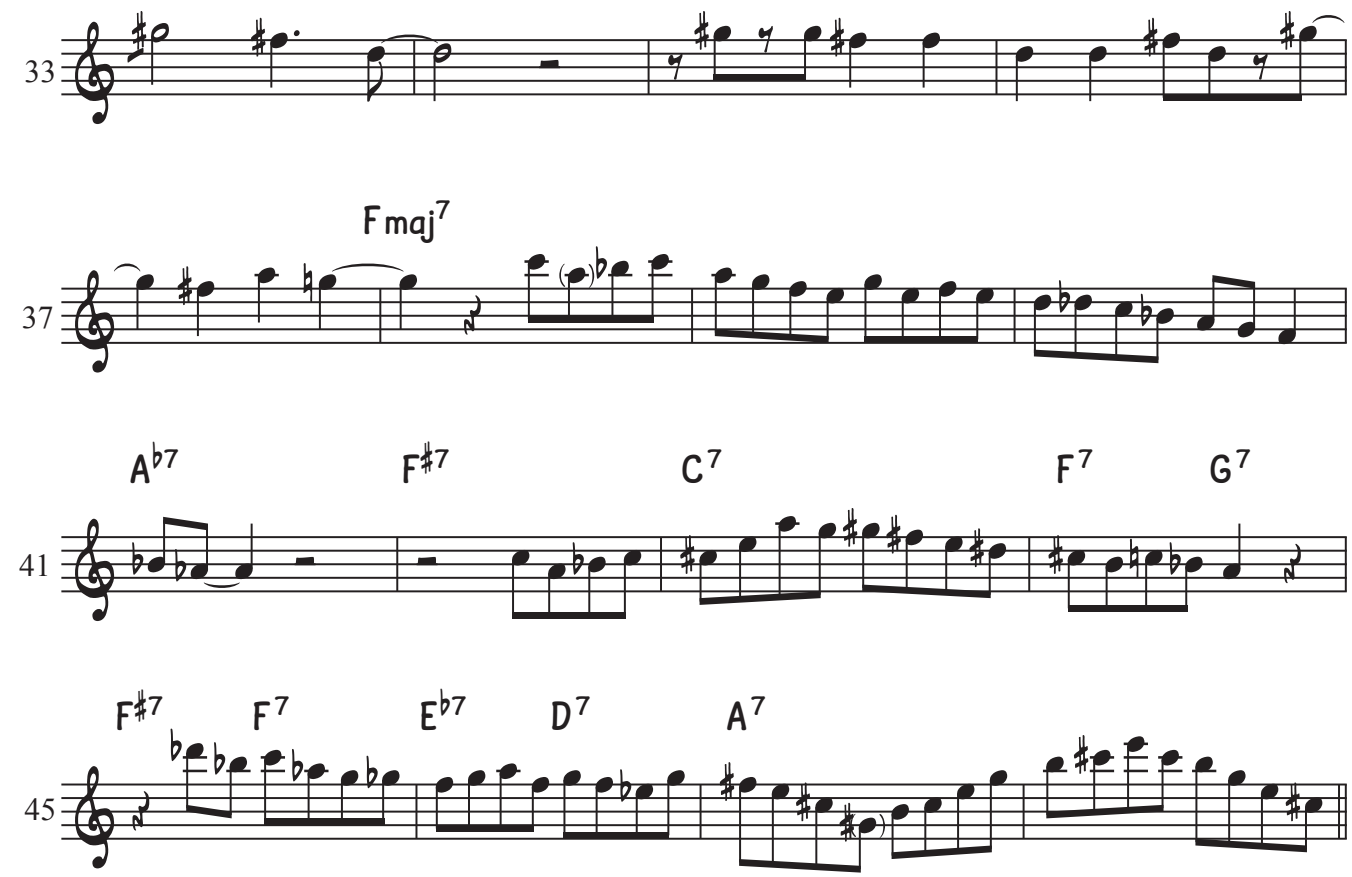




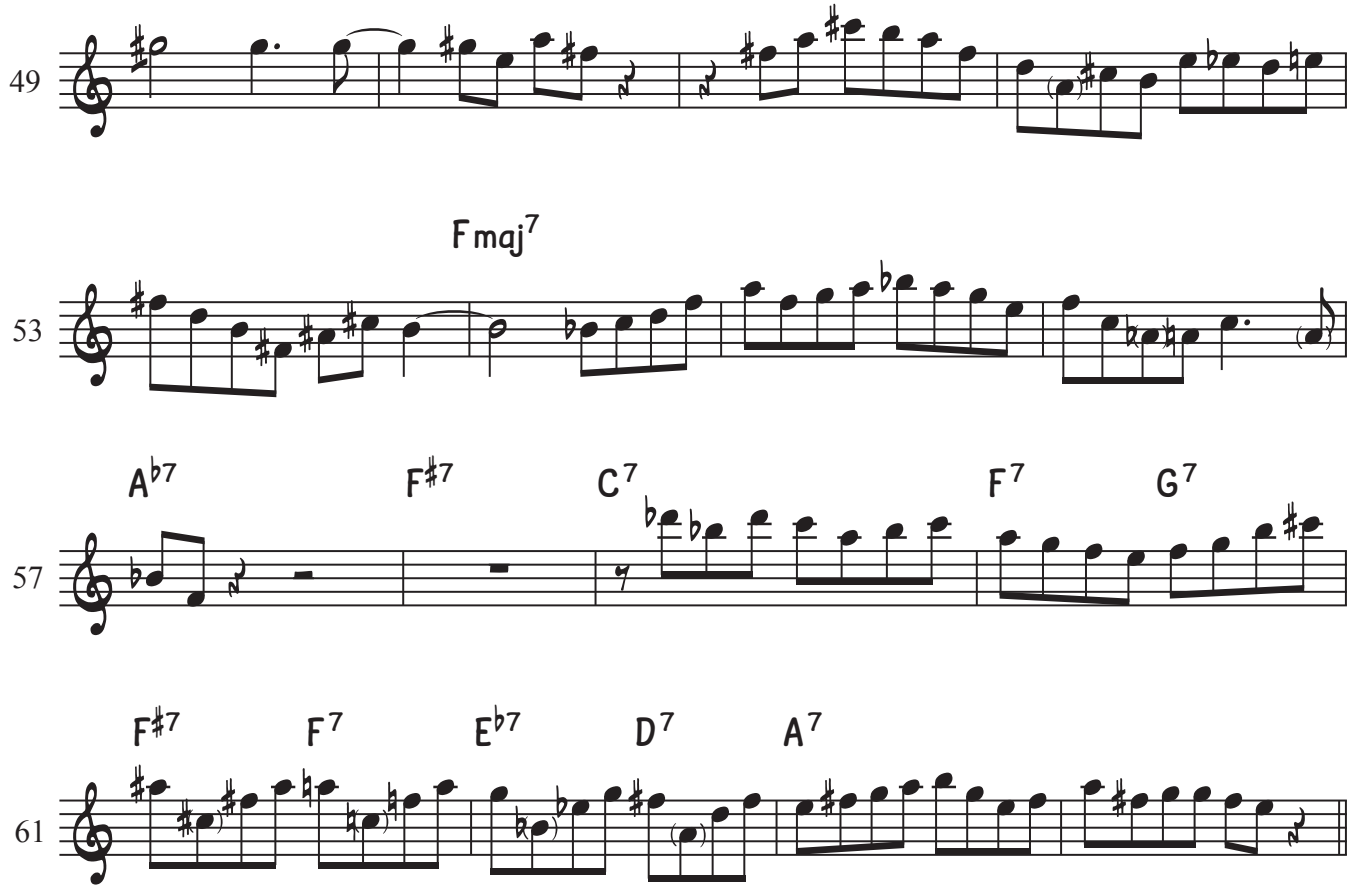
Chorus 2 Bmi^7/E



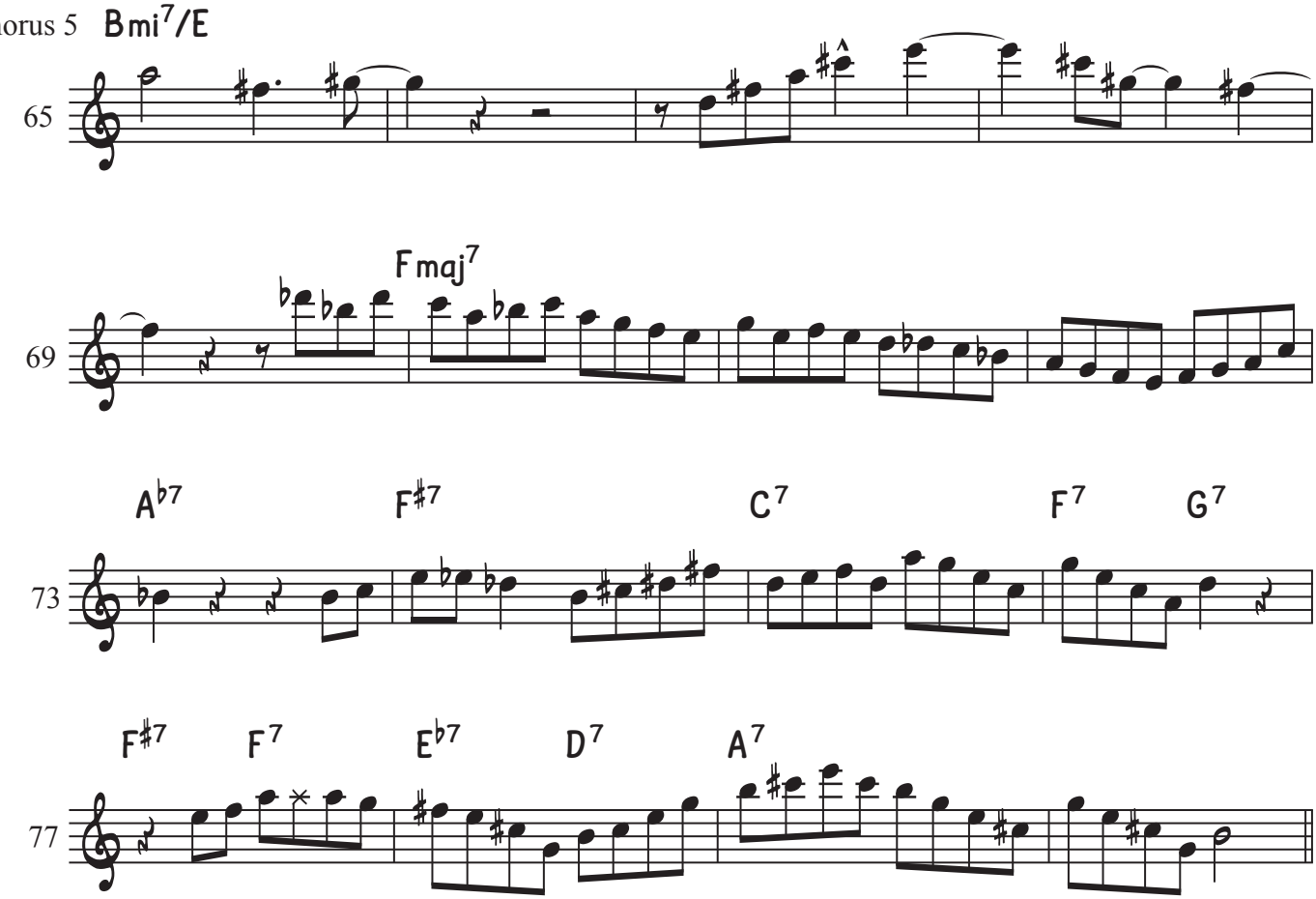
Chorus 3 Bmi^7/E



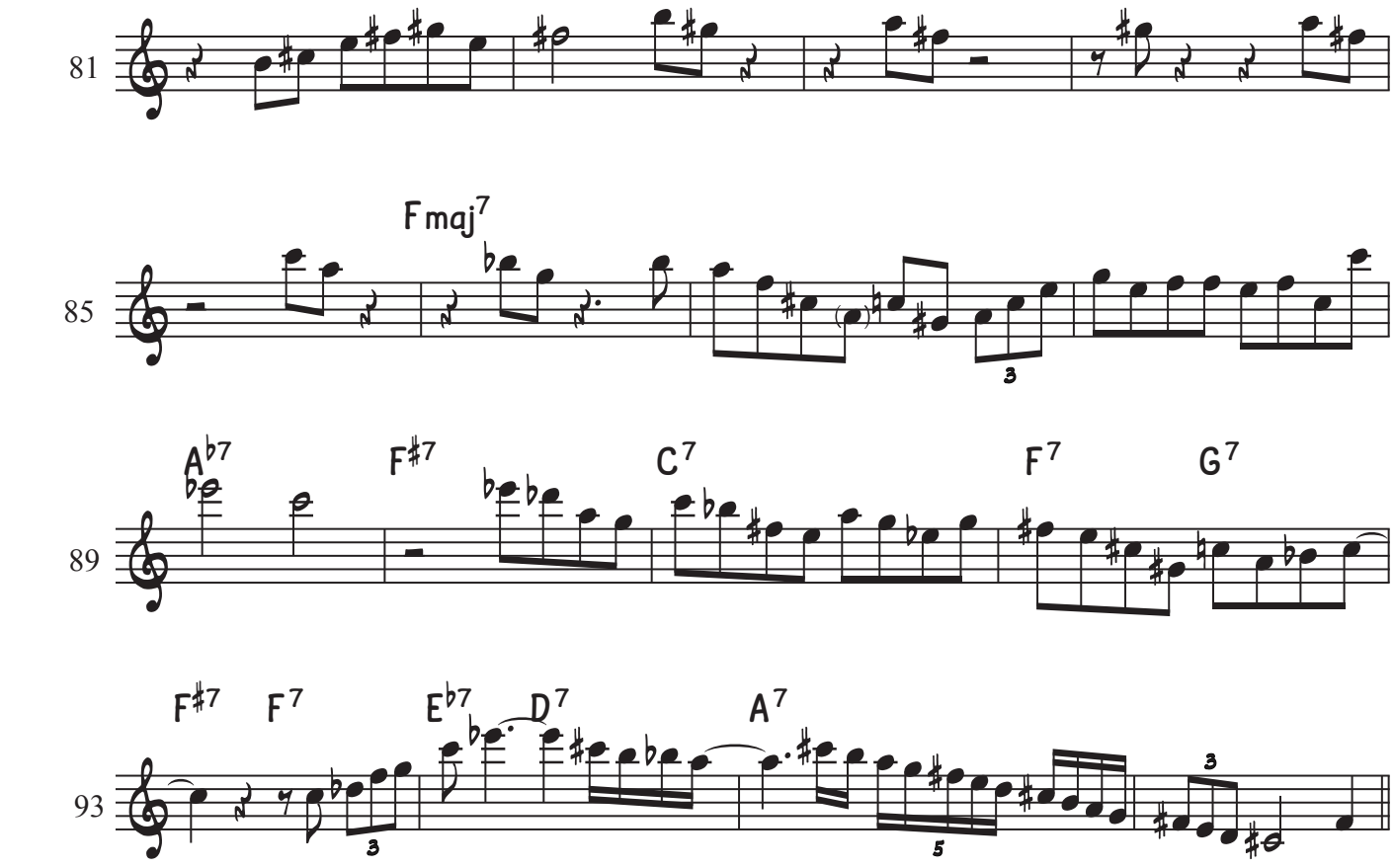
Chorus 4 Bmi7/E



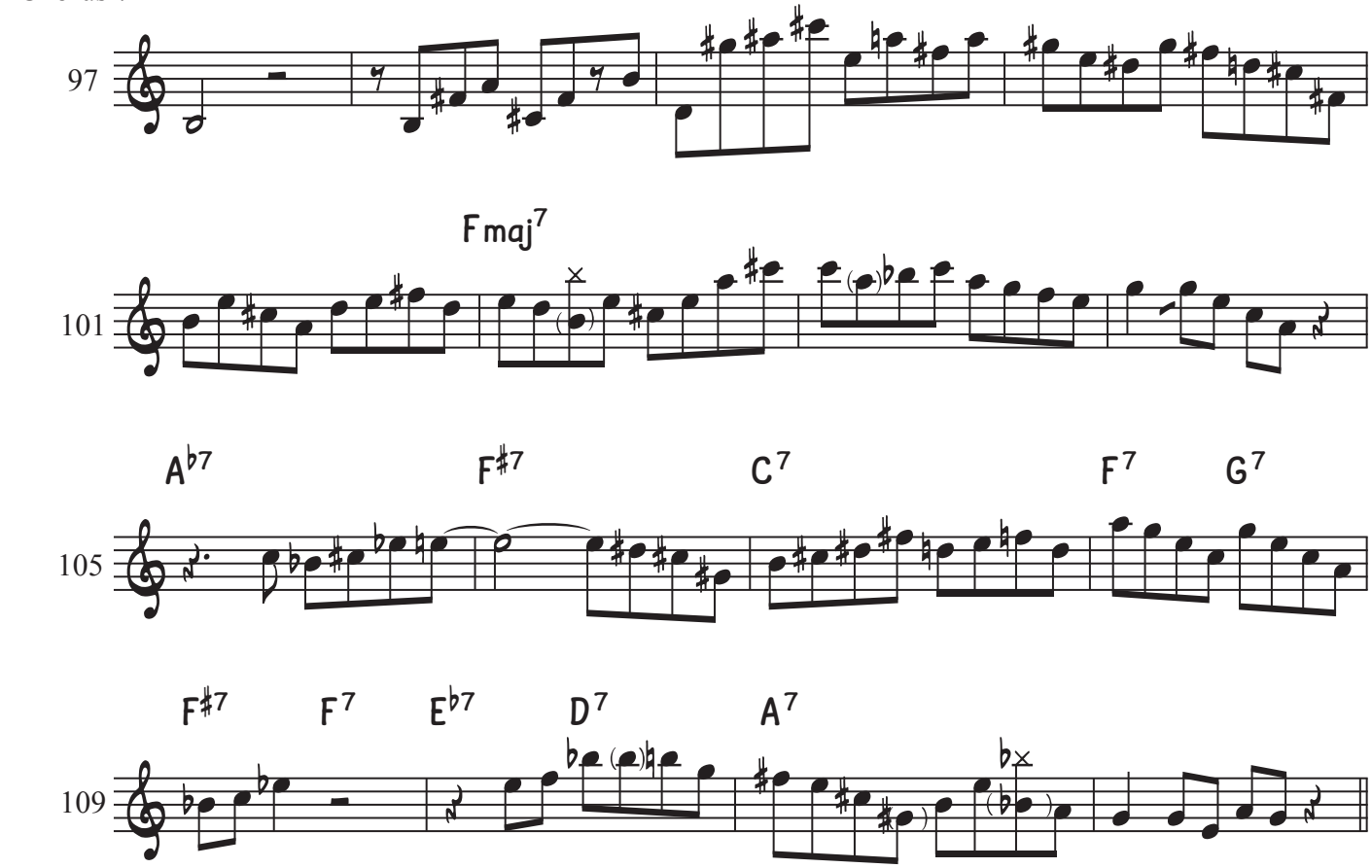
Chorus 5 Bmi7/E



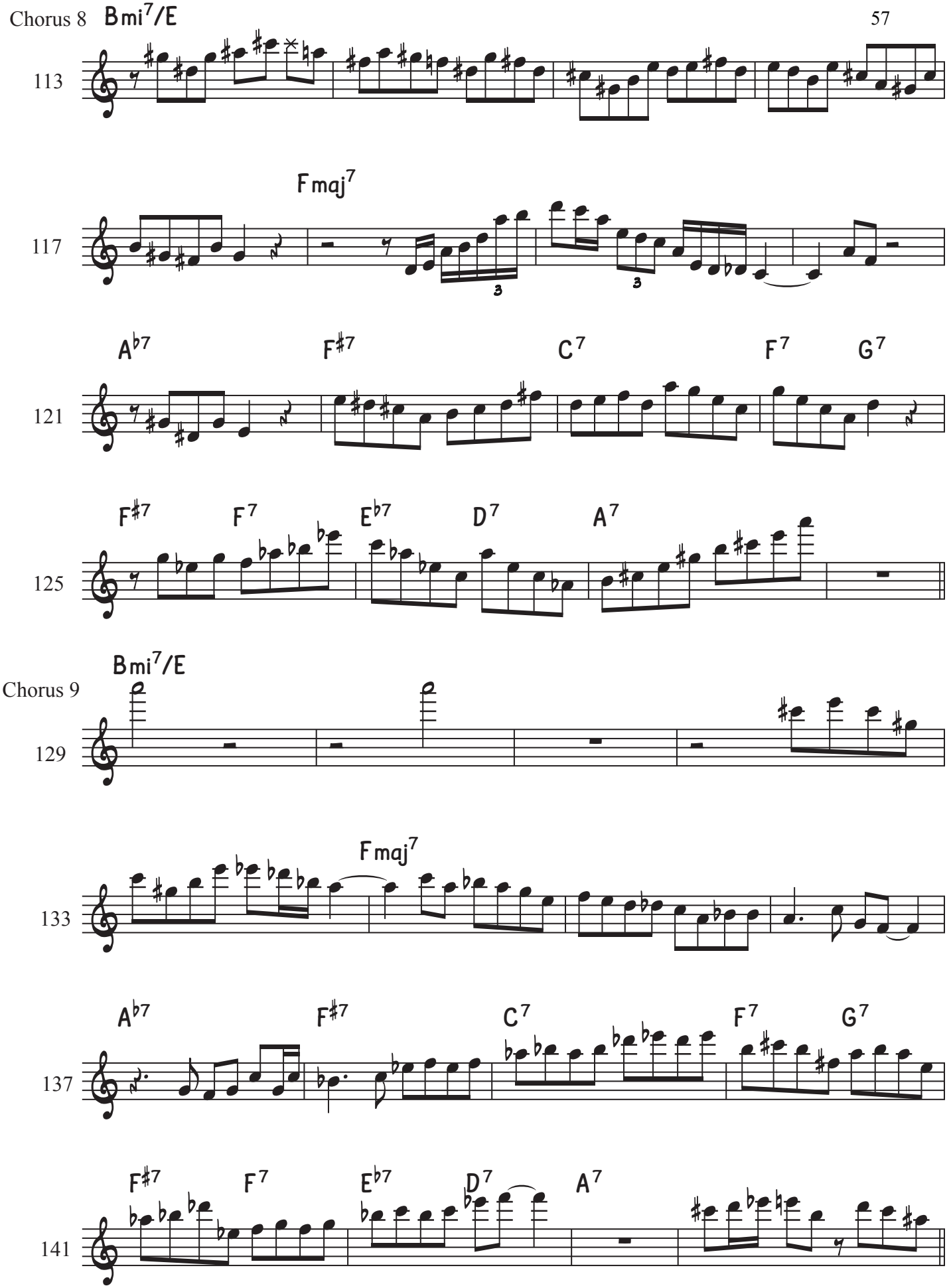
Chorus 6 Bmi7/E



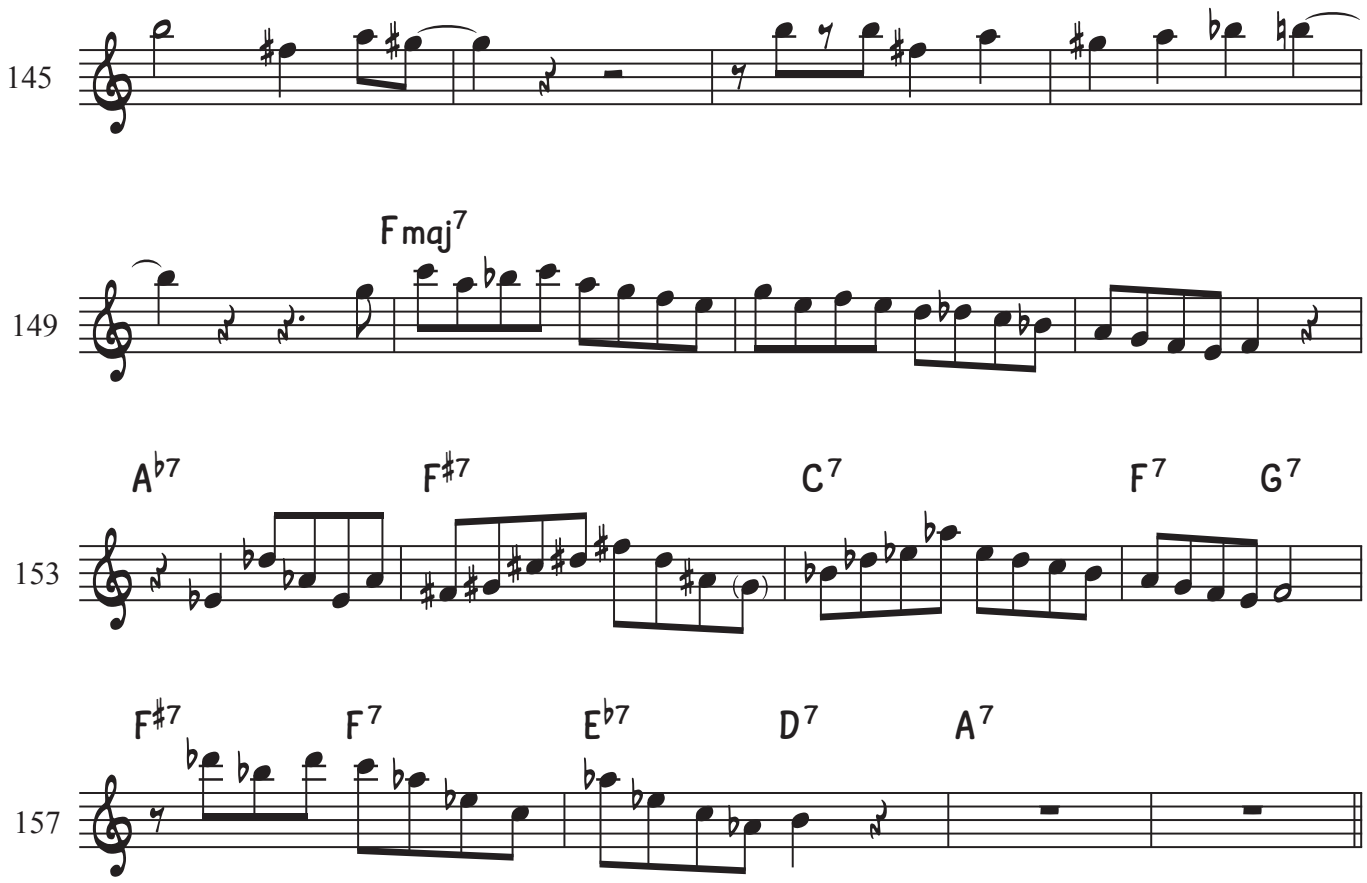
Chorus 7 Bmi7/E



Chorus 8


Bmi7/E
113
Fmaj7
117
Ab7
F#7
C7
F7
G7
121
F#7
F7
Eb7
D7
A7
125
Chorus 9
Bmi7/E
129
Fmaj7
133
Ab7
F#7
C7
F7
G7
137
F#7
F7
Eb7
D7
A7
141

Chorus 10 Bmi^7/E



Steve Grossman Solo Transcription On

Taurus People

From The Album *Take The "D" Train*

Released 2001 On Disques Dreyfus

Farouq Dawud

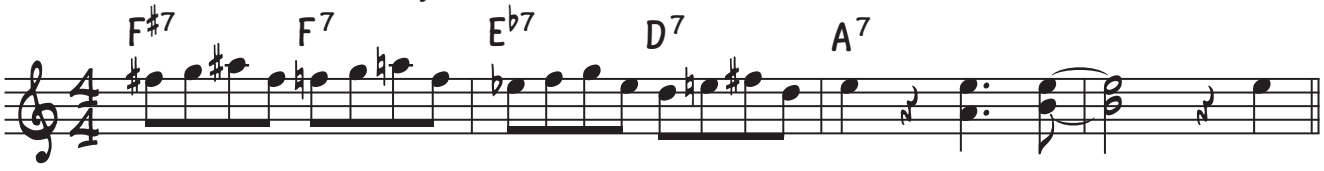
Transcription by David Bernot

Transposed for Bb Tenor Saxophone

Starts at 0:38

Uptempo Swing ♩= 190

Last 4 Measures of Melody



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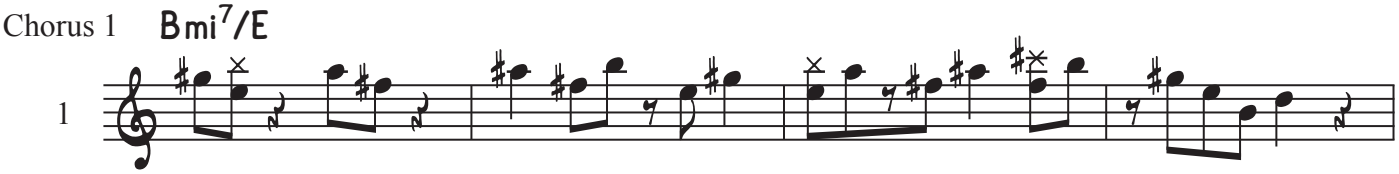

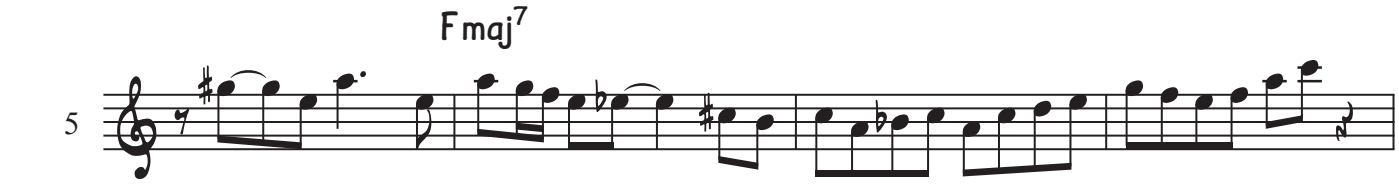

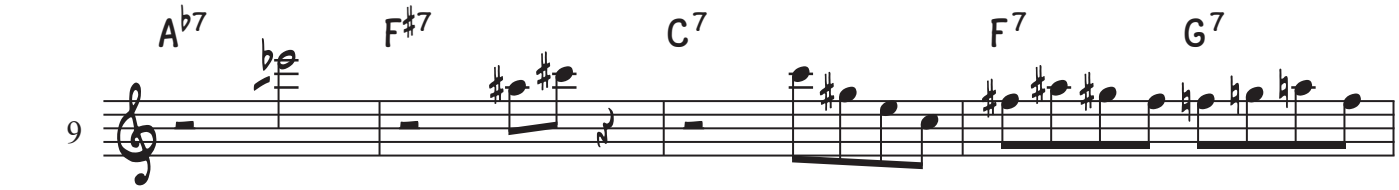

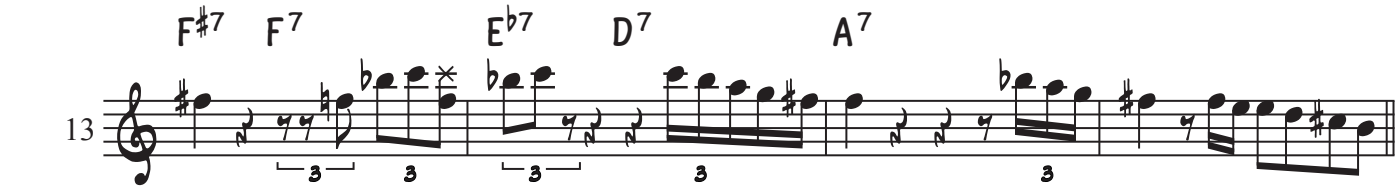

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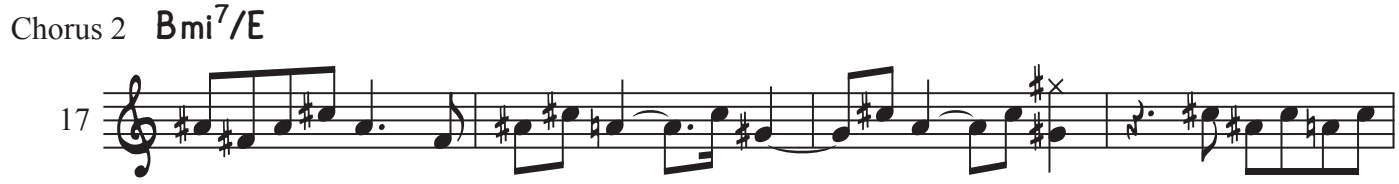

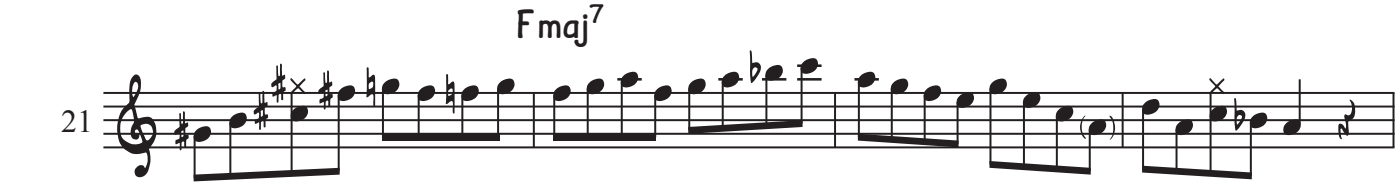

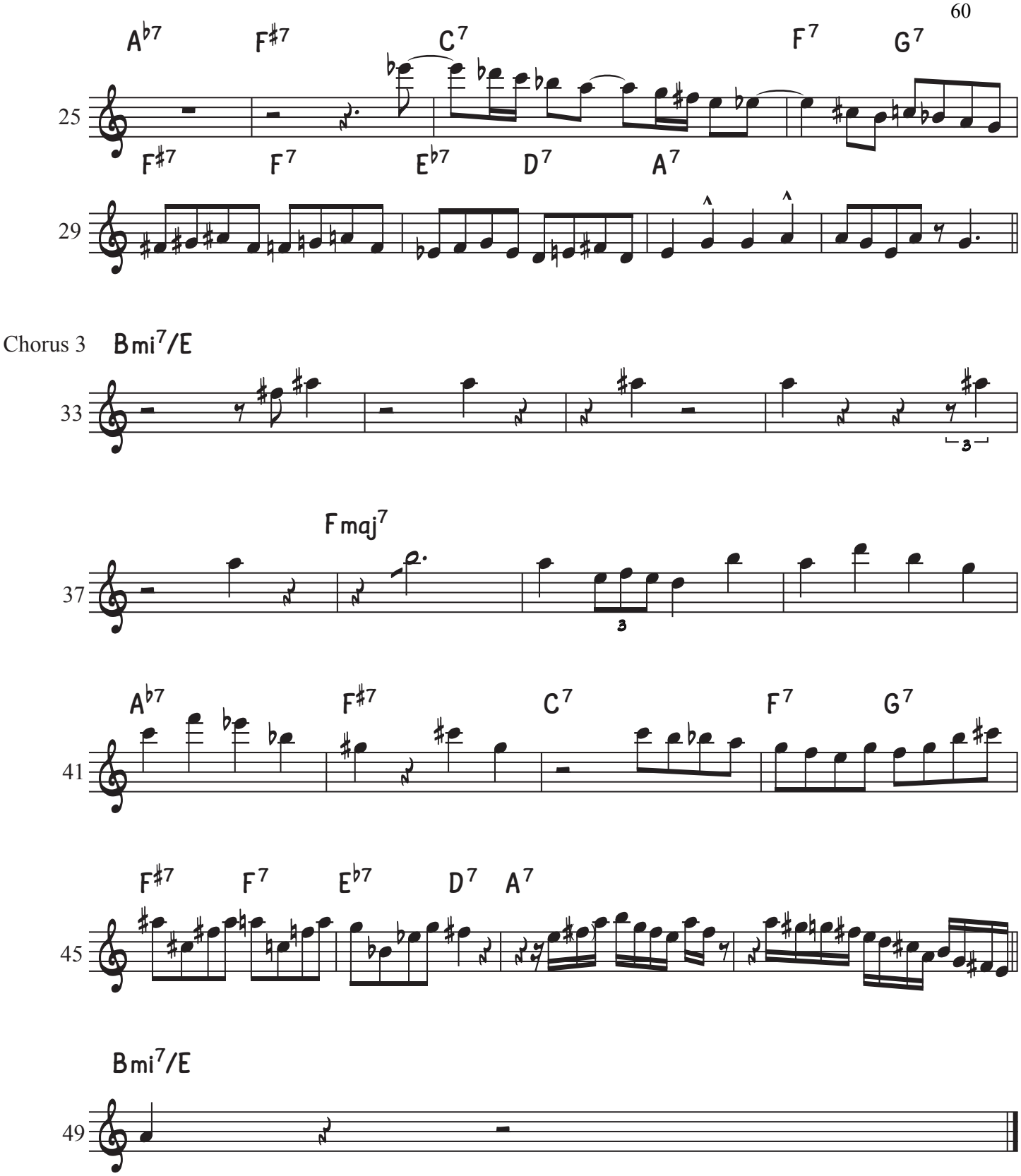
A♭7
F♯7
C7
F7
G7
25
F♯7
F7
E♭7
D7
A7
29
Chorus 3
Bmi7/E
33
3
Fmaj7
37
3
A♭7
F♯7
C7
F7
G7
41
F♯7
F7
E♭7
D7
A7
45
Bmi7/E
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