

SCOTT LAFARO'S LIFE AND HIS SOLOING
APPROACH AS A MEMBER OF THE BILL EVANS TRIO
(1959 - 1961)

By

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B.M., Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, 2014

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Masters of Music
Jazz Studies Program

2019

“Scott LaFaro’s life and his soloing approach as a member of the Bill Evans Trio (1959 - 1961)”
written by Leonardo Argüello Hernández has been approved by the College of Music

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories and we find both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above-mentioned discipline.

ABSTRACT

Scott LaFaro's position in the evolution of the jazz bass is considered extremely important. He was a man who pushed the technical intricacies of the instrument and developed a unique and innovative voice. As a member of Bill Evans' seminal trio, his solos combined traits of the previous generation of swing bassists with new rhythmic approaches and an exploration of the entire range of the double bass.

This paper introduces LaFaro's life background and collects and analyzes his soloistic approach from his recordings with the Bill Evans Trio. I have transcribed improvised solos from recordings of the Bill Evans Trio, from the years 1959–1961. The solos chosen for this study are "Waltz for Debby," "Nardis," "Gloria's Step," "Autumn Leaves," and "Solar." Through comparative analysis of these solos, I will describe the musical formulas, common techniques, tendencies, and approaches which define LaFaro's improvisational style during this period.

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the bass role in jazz has changed significantly throughout jazz history. Until the mid 1950's that role was fairly prescribed to time keeping and root function and the solo aspect was rare. It was not until 1935 that Israel Crosby was credited with taking the first recorded bass solo on "Blues for Israel"¹. In the late 1950's and early 1960's bass players such as Charles Mingus, Red Mitchell, and Scott LaFaro emerged as prominent and innovative soloists. This study will highlight the way in which LaFaro's musical and personal background influenced his evolution as a bassist. His interactive role in Bill Evans' trio created an alternative style of bass playing both as a rhythm section player and as an improviser. LaFaro's solo approach shows advancements over previous generations of jazz bassists, with his unique style developed in this trio.

¹ David Chevan, *The Double Bass as a Solo Instrument in Early Jazz. The Black Perspective in Music* 17, no. 1/2 (1989), 73-92.

BIOGRAPHY AND BACKGROUND

Rocco Scott LaFaro was born in Irvington, a suburb of Newark, New Jersey on April 3, 1936. He was the eldest child of Helen Lucille Scott and Rocco Joseph LaFaro. Scott LaFaro grew up in a musical family. His father, Rocco Joseph LaFaro was a classically trained violinist who studied at Ithaca College, and also a jazz lover. In fact, after the conservatory, he joined some big-name bands of the 1920's including Paul Whiteman, Ed Kirkeby, and Rudy Vallee, among others. Joseph would often take young Scott to the Presbyterian Church, where choirs sang in gregorian chant, and would also bring him to jazz concerts. This started Scott on his musical journey. During LaFaro's senior year, his father would take him to hear some of the famous musicians of the era such as Tony Bennett, Nat King Cole, Stan Kenton, Duke Ellington, and Dizzy Gillespie.

Along with the early influence of his father's musical involvement, LaFaro began studying piano in the sixth grade, later changing to bass clarinet, and then to tenor saxophone in jazz band in high school. Quickly, LaFaro surpassed his classmates, both in his engagement with the music, and in his passion and drive. During his senior year in high school, LaFaro won a prestigious competition enabling him to perform with the Seneca Symphony Society's Orchestra, playing *Concertina* by Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826).² LaFaro's enthusiasm drove him to study music in college. However, before taking an audition at Ithaca College, LaFaro found out that in order to be a music education major, he had to play a stringed instrument. It was then that his father suggested that he play the double bass.

² Helene LaFaro-Fernandez, *Jade visions: the life and music of Scott LaFaro* (Texas: University of North Texas, 2009), 33.

Before starting at Ithaca College in the fall of 1954, LaFaro began taking bass lessons with Nick D'Angelo, a friend of his father. He continued studying bass with the cellist Forrest Sanders since there was no bass instructor at Ithaca. LaFaro's roommate, Gerry Zampino, (later to become a clarinetist with the Syracuse Symphony,) remembers the day LaFaro gave him his clarinet, saying that he already knew he was not intending to be a professional clarinetist.³ LaFaro's rapid progress allowed him to perform in public quickly. By 1955, after playing occasionally throughout the upstate New York area (Geneva, Syracuse, and Buffalo), LaFaro landed his first big-time job. His tutor Nick D'Angelo recommended him for the Buddy Morrow Orchestra. LaFaro toured with Buddy Morrow over the course of the next year, and through this travel, eventually visited to the West Coast, where he would soon make his home.

After his father died in 1957, LaFaro, along with his two sisters and mother, relocated to Los Angeles, California. LaFaro was able to collaborate with prominent musicians in L.A. during this time, such as Don Friedman, Harold Land, Billy Higgins, Elmo Hope, Terry Trotter, Charles Lloyd, and Clare Fisher. He was also connected to various prominent bass players in the area, such as Ray Brown, Don Payne, Leroy Vinnegar, Hal Gaylor, Gary Peacock, and Red Mitchell, who would later become his primary mentor. Mitchell was crucial in LaFaro's bass education because he introduced him to the virtuosic two-finger pizzicato style. This new technique allowed LaFaro to develop flashy melodies and solo lines that flowed more naturally and with greater ease than other players of that era.⁴

³ Helene LaFaro-Fernandez, *Jade visions: the life and music of Scott LaFaro* (Texas: University of North Texas, 2009), 44.

⁴ Steven A. Cerra, *Scott LaFaro—Young Mr. LaFaro—Part I*, Jazz Profiles, June 13, 2016, accessed January 21, 2019.

After leaving Morrow's band, LaFaro joined trumpet player and singer Chet Baker's band, touring with him for the next seven months.

A significant year in LaFaro's career and in the development of jazz was 1958. At that time, many talented musicians were gathered in Los Angeles, creating what would become known as the West Coast jazz scene. During this period, LaFaro made an important connection with vibraphonist/pianist Victor Feldman. Although they had first met in New York, Victor now resided in California and their paths crossed, leading LaFaro to join his trio alongside drummer Stan Levey. In January of this year they recorded *The Arrival of Victor Feldman*, LaFaro's first full-scale recording. With this recording, LaFaro positioned himself as a strong bebop bassist whose walking bass lines were deeply rooted in the jazz tradition, but whose solo lines were already beginning to stretch the idiom.⁵ LaFaro and Feldman would continue to collaborate for years to come, playing together on Mondays with Feldman's Trio at the Lighthouse Cafe in L.A.

Another important association made during this same year was with tenor saxophonist Stan Getz. Getz was impressed by LaFaro's virtuosity and innovative style. From January 31st to February 9th, LaFaro played with Getz and Cal Tjader at the Black Hawk in San Francisco, recording another important album titled *The Cal Tjader-Stan Getz Sextet*. By March, LaFaro recorded his third album, *For Real* with pianist Hampton Hawes.

Italian-American clarinet player Buddy DeFranco hired LaFaro for his recording *Buddy DeFranco and his Septette*, on April 4th. DeFranco wasn't expecting LaFaro to be so advanced, and was greatly impressed with his virtuosity, ability to play in broken time, and technique.

⁵ John Goldsby, *The Jazz Bass Book: Technique and Tradition* (San Francisco, CA: Backbeat Books, 2002), 108.

These elements were ahead of their time. Buddy was surprised that LaFaro used the *H. Klose Celebrated Clarinet Method* to practice technique.⁶

As LaFaro's technique developed, his sound evolved, in part due to his legendary instrument.⁷ By late April of 1958, while having dinner in Hollywood, LaFaro's Kaye light-colored bass was stolen from his car. After the theft of this instrument, with the help of his mentor Red Mitchell, LaFaro obtained an *1825 Abraham Prescott Double Bass*, which was a three-quarter size with "busetto corners".⁸ Bill Evans said;

"It had a marvelous sustaining and resonating quality. He [LaFaro] would be playing in the hotel room and hit a quadruple stop that was a harmonious sound, and then set the bass on its side and it seemed the sound just rang and rang for so long."⁹

By October 1958, LaFaro played with the Sonny Rollins Quartet. In a 1960 interview with Martin Williams, LaFaro commented about his influences during this time;

"I think horn players and pianists have probably influenced me the most. Miles Davis, Coltrane, Bill Evans, and Sonny Rollins perhaps deepest of all. Sonny is technically good, harmonically imaginative, and really creative. He uses all he knows to make finished music when he improvises."¹⁰

During November, LaFaro went to New York to record with the Pat Moran Trio which included the drummer Gene Gammage. LaFaro had previously crossed paths with Pat Moran in

⁶ Helene LaFaro-Fernandez, *Jade visions: the life and music of Scott LaFaro* (Texas: University of North Texas, 2009), 85.

⁷ Steven A. Cerra, "Scott LaFaro—Young Mr. LaFaro—Part 4," *Jazz Profiles*, June 13, 2016, accessed January 21, 2019.

⁸ Jonas Lohse, "About The Double Bass," *Double Bass Guide*, accessed January 22, 2019, http://doublebassguide.com/?page_id=3.

⁹ Peter Pettinger, *Bill Evans: How My Heart Sings* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 113.

¹⁰ Martin Williams, *Introducing Scott LaFaro*. *Jazz Review*, 7th ser., 3 (August 3, 1960), 16.

1957 when playing in the Chicago area. As a result of the New York session, two important albums emerged: *This is Pat Moran: The Pat Moran Trio*, and *Beverly Kelly Sings with the Pat Moran Trio*.

1959 was filled with both personal and professional gains: LaFaro met his girlfriend, Gloria Gabriel (who would remain so until his death), and he connected with band leader Stan Kenton. Before returning to New York, LaFaro recorded *The Stan Kenton Orchestra in Concert*. LaFaro toured throughout the country with Kenton's orchestra.

LaFaro's influences were not restricted to jazz music. Drummer Al Levitt, who was close to LaFaro, recalls that LaFaro often listened to classical music. This included composers Charles Ives, Zoltan Kodaly, and Bela Bartok. In fact, pianist Don Friedman talks about LaFaro's fascination for "minor seventh flat five" chords being inspired by Bartok's *Mandarin Suite*. This fascination with this sonority can be seen in his later composition "Gloria's Step".¹¹

As we can see, LaFaro's quick progress on the bass led him to play with renowned artists of this era. He could never imagined that five years after picking up the bass, he would have the opportunity to play with Bill Evans. In 1957, when playing sessions at the Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach, LaFaro roomed with fellow bassist Charlie Haden. He recalled the first time LaFaro mentioned Bill Evans; "I remember one time LaFaro came home with an LP under his arm. He was excited. He said, 'Man, you've gotta hear this. This is the best piano player I've ever heard'." It was Evans's 1956 debut album, *New Jazz Conceptions*.¹² LaFaro officially met

¹¹ Helene LaFaro-Fernandez, *Jade visions: the life and music of Scott LaFaro* (Texas: University of North Texas, 2009), 100-101.

¹² Tom Reney, "Scott LaFaro, The Short Life of a Master Bassist," New England Public Radio, accessed December 25, 2018, <https://www.nepr.net/post/scott-lafaro-short-life-master-bassist#stream/0>.

Bill Evans after sitting in one night at Basin Street East club, right across from a club where he was playing with singer Bobby Troup. This event led to an important chapter in jazz history: the birth of Bill Evans' first accomplished trio.

After leaving Miles Davis' band in November 1958, Bill Evans had the idea to form his own trio. Knowing Evans' intentions, Davis recommended bass player Jimmy Garrison and drummer Kenny Dennis. This trio lasted about two weeks after a bad experience at the Basin Street Club. Furthermore, Garrison's conservative style of playing wasn't matching Evans' concept of a conversational approach in which each instrument improvised freely to create a contrapuntal and complex texture. Luckily, in his search to break away from the convention of traditional jazz roles, Evans crossed paths with two like minded musicians. They included the drummer Paul Motian and the twenty-three-year-old bassist Scott LaFaro.¹³ The idea of bassists and pianists engaging in a musical conversation had been explored by Duke Ellington and Jimmy Blanton in 1940 on an album called "Duo". However, this concept was redefined by Evans and LaFaro, and reached its peak in their last recording as a trio.¹⁴

By December 1959 the trio was consolidating their first recording *Portrait in Jazz*. The numbers "Peri's Scope," "Witchcraft," and "Autumn Leaves" are examples of the conversational concept Bill Evans was pursuing. Emerging ideas such as soloing in tandem, dropping in and out to allow call and response, spontaneous interaction, and unconventional bass lines were the result

¹³ Peter Pettinger, *Bill Evans: How My Heart Sings* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 110.

¹⁴ Mark C. Gridley and David Cutler, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*. Vol. 8. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 288.

of this experimental session. Sometimes defined as a transitional record, *Portrait in Jazz* shows amazing musical interplay, especially between LaFaro and Evans.

LaFaro's popularity increased significantly after joining the Bill Evans Trio. A few months after recording his first studio session with Evans, LaFaro was invited to participate in many important studio sessions. By April, he had recorded *Booker Little* with trumpet player Booker Little and drummer Roy Haynes, and by May, he had recorded an important tribute to Gunther Schuller's music. This recording, named *In Person: Jazz by Schuller*, featured important artists from the era such as Cannonball Adderley, Eric Dolphy, Ornette Coleman, and Evans Trio. By the end of the year, Scott participated in Steve Kuhn's recording *The Walkers*. In this session, they experimented with medieval church music concepts and modality. Simultaneously, LaFaro became a strong voice in the "free jazz" scene.. Another important contribution not just for his own resume, but also for the development of jazz, were two albums recorded with tenor saxophonist Ornette Coleman titled *Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation*, and *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life*.¹⁵

Although Evans did not do any recordings with his trio during 1960, they gathered again by February 1961 to make their second studio session titled *Explorations*. Even though the trio was reaching a considerable output, there was a turbid atmosphere during this recording session. In a 1966 interview with George Klabin, Evans said: "The explorations album I wasn't going to

¹⁵ John Goldsby, *The Jazz Bass Book: Technique and Tradition* (San Francisco, CA: Backbeat Books, 2002), 109.

release. We had a very, very bad feeling within the group that night for reasons which I won't bother to explain.”¹⁶

Additionally, LaFaro used a different bass for this session since his usual Prescott was being repaired.¹⁷ The sound captured in the recording shows slight differences from his usual sound. It was less bright in the upper register, and sustained less than usual. In spite of the difficulties faced, and the tense atmosphere between Evans and LaFaro, *Explorations* strengthened Evans' concept and allowed LaFaro to continue developing his innovative style. The tune “Beautiful Love” from this session, shows how LaFaro's approach was advancing in the conversational style, providing a broad range of countermelodies and colors for the collective interaction.

Shortly after recording *Explorations*, LaFaro made what would be his final recording with the trio at the prestigious Village Vanguard, in New York City. On Sundays, the Village Vanguard booked two sets in the afternoon, and three in the evening. Two albums that heavily influenced the history of jazz resulted from these performances: *Sunday at the Village Vanguard*, and *Waltz for Debby*. Gloria Gabriel, LaFaro's girlfriend at the time, expressed; “They [the trio] were so wired from that evening, people talking, rapping, doing everything.. Scotty was just thrilled, so was Bill.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Scott LaFaro, Don Friedman, and Pete La Roca, "Interview with Bill Evans by George Klabin" recorded 1966. Album is *In Pieces of Jade* (Resonance Records, 2009).

¹⁷ Peter Pettinger, *Bill Evans: How My Heart Sings* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 104.

¹⁸ Bill Evans, “Bill Evans Time Remembered: The Life and Music of Bill Evans, featuring Tony Bennet, Bill Evans, and Eric Reed” directed by Bruce Spiegel, 1952 (United States: Filmhub, 2015).

Considered by many the peak of this trio's work, these sessions exhibit high levels of musicianship, interplay, communication, and virtuosity, consolidating Evans' initial idea. Regarding LaFaro's performance, the solos recorded on these sessions show his highest point of virtuosity, creativity, and melodic approach. These solos opened the door for a wide variety of possibilities never before conceived in bass soloing. Bassist Bill Crow remarks that when he was listening at the Village Vanguard during those sessions; "I remember how delighted Ray Brown was, sitting at the table next to mine. He kept saying, 'This kid has his own thing! Man, he really has his own thing!'"¹⁹

After playing the acclaimed session at the Village Vanguard with the Bill Evans Trio, LaFaro went to play—what would be his last performance, at the Newport Jazz Festival with the Stan Getz Quartet on June 2. Four days later, Scott met with an old high school friend and planned to go to Geneva in order to take care of the sale of his mother's house. On the way to Geneva, LaFaro tragically crashed his car on Route 5-20 in upstate New York, and passed away that night. At only 25 years of age, and only 6 years into his bass career, Scott LaFaro transcended many generations as an innovator on his instrument, as well as becoming one of the best musicians in jazz history. After LaFaro's sudden death, Riverside Records quickly released *Sunday at the Village Vanguard Featuring Scott LaFaro* emphasizing his contribution. Two of the tunes recorded were his original compositions *Gloria's Step* and *Jade Visions*.²⁰

¹⁹ Steven A. Cerra, *Scott LaFaro—Young Mr. LaFaro—Part I*, Jazz Profiles, June 13, 2016, accessed February 26, 2019.

²⁰ Peter Pettinger, *Bill Evans: How My Heart Sings* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 114.

SECTION 2

LAFARO'S SOLO VOCABULARY

Although Scott LaFaro's career lasted scarcely six years, his playing revolutionized the conception of bass soloing in jazz. Some techniques used by LaFaro were developed due to the physical and technical circumstances of the double bass. LaFaro used gut strings and never used a pickup. This means that the ability to sustain notes, specially in the upper register, were very limited. As a result, he developed innovative ideas, some associated with classical acoustic guitar, and in this way counteracted some of the limitations. These techniques include: tremolos to sustain melodic curve, long diatonic and scalar runs, ostinato patterns often bound to asymmetric rhythms, and his virtuosic guitar-oriented right hand technique.²¹

The following chapter analyzes excerpts from selected solo transcriptions from his recordings as member of the Bill Evans Trio, recorded between 1959 and 1961. These excerpts demonstrate how LaFaro employs the melodic devices in the context of a real improvisation. Transcriptions with harmonic analysis are attached in the Appendix. A careful analysis of the transcribed solos can give great insight into the vocabulary of Scott LaFaro.

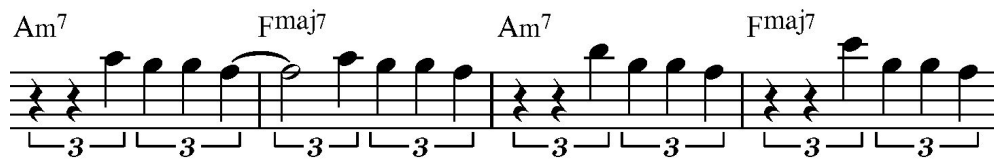
²¹ Keith Shadwick, *Bill Evans: Everything Happens to Me* (San Francisco, CA: Backbeat Books), 67.

Rhythmic approach

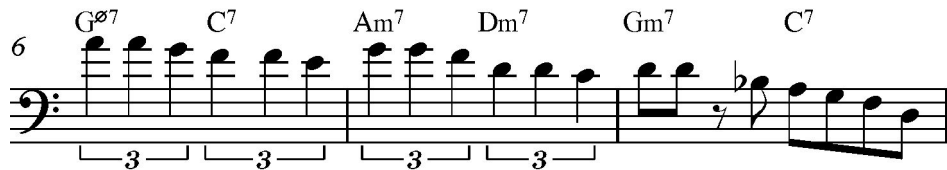
Use of quarter-note triplet

This could be the most common rhythmic device used by LaFaro, especially in his last two albums “Waltz for Debby” and “Live at The Village Vanguard”.

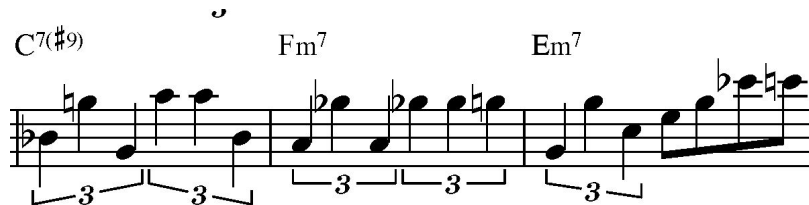
“Nardis” mm. 17 - 20:



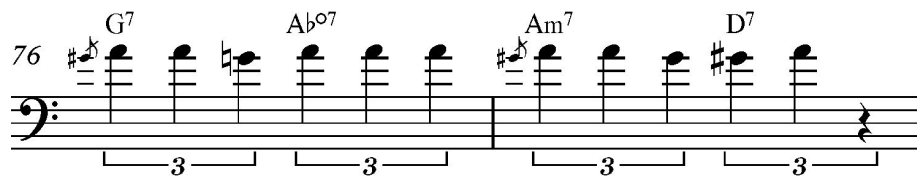
“Waltz for Debby” mm. 6 - 8



“Gloria’s Step” mm. 49 - 51:



“Waltz for Debby” mm. 76 - 79:



Quarter-note with final eighth-note triplet rhythmic unit

This rhythmic cell (made up of the quarter-note triplet with the added final eighth-notes as shown below) is found in motives in every recording of Evan's trio. One of many ways to notice the influence of Evan's rhythmic approach in LaFaro's playing can be found in this motivic formula.

"Waltz for Debby mm. 22 - 23



"Gloria's Step" mm. 22 - 24



"Nardis" mm. 30 - 31



Ascending and descending eighth-note triplet scalar passages

Scott LaFaro often ascends from half-position up to the higher register triplet by employing eighth-note triplet runs through the G string.

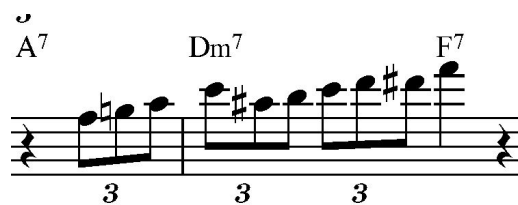
“Waltz for Debby” mm. 36 - 37



“Nardis” mm. 94



“Waltz for Debby” mm. 19 - 20



“Gloria’s Step” mm. 17 - 18



Tremolo

Scott LaFaro, in his search to increase sustain, developed a guitar-tremolo technique in his virtuosic right hand pizzicato approach.

Sustain was a constant problem when only gut-strings were available, therefore LaFaro played tremolos in order to prolong the sound, especially in the upper register.

“Waltz for Debby” mm. 37

“Solar” mm. 53 - 54

53 Fmaj7



The musical notation for measure 53 is on a bass staff. It begins with a whole note F (below the staff), followed by a quarter note A (below the staff), a quarter note C (below the staff), and a quarter note G (below the staff). The measure ends with a double bar line.

“Nardis” mm. 41

Em⁷

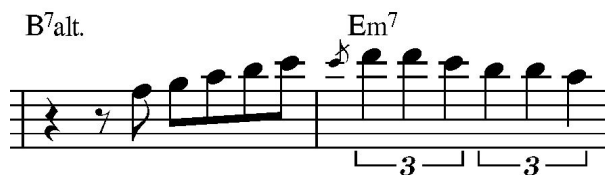
Motivic development

The majority of LaFaro's solos feature linear melodic contour and the develop of motives or fragments. Below is an example of how LaFaro developed theme A in ascending stepwise eighth notes, followed by descending quarter-note triplets in his first solo chorus on "Nardis". The following variations A1 and A2 preserve most part of the original theme rhythmic quality, but the pitch choices are varied.

Theme A mm. 4 - 5



Theme A1 mm. 8 - 9

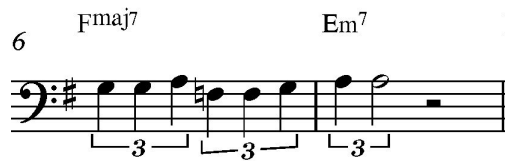


Theme A2 mm. 13 - 15

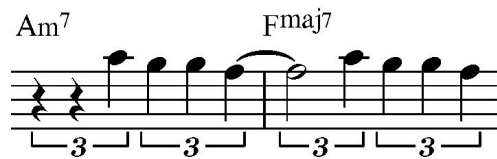


Here is another case in which LaFaro takes a fragment of theme A and develops it into a new phrase.

Fragment 1, theme A mm. 6 - 7



Fragment 2, theme A mm. 17 - 18



Here is another example of motivic development in “Autumn Leaves”.

Theme A mm. 21 - 22



Theme A1 mm. 26 - 27



In the following example, LaFaro begins the second chorus of his solo developing motive A

“Solar”.

Theme A mm. 13 - 14



Theme A 1 mm. 15 - 16



Theme A 2 mm. 18 - 19



Harmonic Implications

LaFaro’s harmonic approach was advanced for his time. I will analyze his tendencies, how each note relates to the harmony, melodic patterns, formulas, and whether he plays over the pre-established changes.

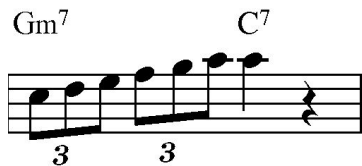
Scalar passages

A way in which LaFaro navigated chord changes was to employ scalar runs in eighth notes or triplets. Some of these devices were utilized for different purposes, such as accessing the thumb position, or playing fast passages while making good usage of open strings. Bassist Marc Johnson notes that LaFaro set the string action reasonably low to the fingerboard, in this way facilitating playing passages at fast tempos.²²

“Nardis” mm. 4



“Waltz for Debby” mm. 2



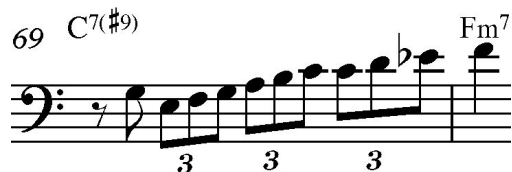
In the following example, LaFaro imposes a whole-tone scale run over an F minor chord.

“Solar” mm. 7

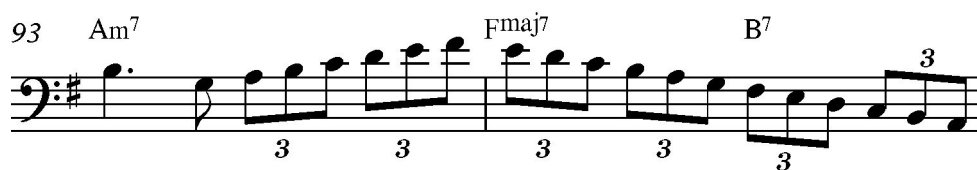


²² Helene LaFaro-Fernandez, *Jade visions: the life and music of Scott LaFaro* (Texas: University of North Texas, 2009), 165.

“Gloria’s Step” mm. 69



“Nardis” mm. 93 - 94



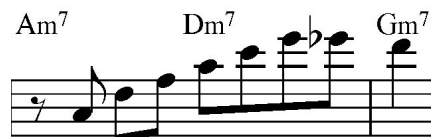
Arpeggios

The use of arpeggios gives a clear idea of what the improviser wants to imply, harmonically.

Sometimes LaFaro combines arpeggios with other melodic devices, particularly when changing the direction of the melody.

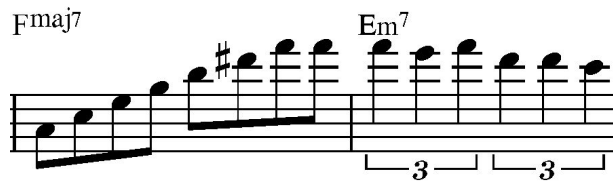
The next example shows how LaFaro plays F major 9th arpeggio with a passing tone to arrive at the 7th of the following chord.

“Waltz for Debby” mm. 25



In the next case LaFaro superimposes a CMaj13#11 arpeggio against an FMaj7 chord. It is also worth noting that he changes direction (ascending-descending) after a long arpeggiation.

“Nardis” mm. 14



In the next example LaFaro implies a Gm7 descending arpeggio over a DMaj7 chord.

“Gloria’s Step” mm. 62



Chromatic Approach

Sometimes LaFaro approaches chord tones chromatically from above or below. The chromatic approach operates by diatonic upper or lower neighbor tones and passing tones. The examples below show relationships between the notes and the harmony implied. Chromatic passing tones are labeled as “pt”, escaped tones as “et”, appoggiaturas as “a”, enclosures as “enc”, neighbor tone as “nt”, and neighbor group as “ng”.

“Autumn Leaves” mm. 5 - 6

Musical notation for the bass line of 'The Rose Tree'. The key signature is B-flat major (Bb). The notation is on a single staff with a bass clef. The first measure is a whole note G2 (labeled '5' below). The second measure is a half note F2 (labeled '9' above). The third measure is a half note E2 (labeled '7' above). The fourth measure is a half note D2 (labeled '1' above). The fifth measure is a half note C2 (labeled '9' above). The sixth measure is a half note B1 (labeled 'pt' above). The seventh measure is a half note A1 (labeled '3' above). The eighth measure is a half note G1 (labeled '1' above). The ninth measure is a half note F1 (labeled 'pt' above). The tenth measure is a half note E1 (labeled '9' above). The eleventh measure is a half note D1 (labeled '7' above). The twelfth measure is a half note C1 (labeled '1' above). The thirteenth measure is a half note B0 (labeled '7' above). The fourteenth measure is a half note A0 (labeled '6' above). The fifteenth measure is a half note G0 (labeled '5' above).

“Solar” mm. 18 - 19

[illegible]

“Waltz for Debby” mm. 73 - 74

F⁷ Bb⁷ maj⁷ A⁷ alt.

1 pt. 7 13 11 3 9 1 pt. #9 3

1 pt. 7 13 11 3 9 1 pt. #9 3

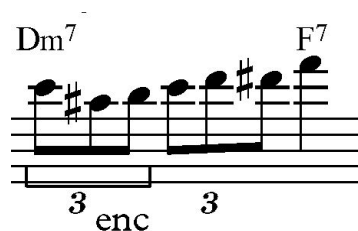
“Gloria’s Step” mm. 35

35 $G\delta^7$ 1 7 1 9 pt 3 pt 11 5 $D\delta^7$ 5 a 7 nt 7 et pt 5

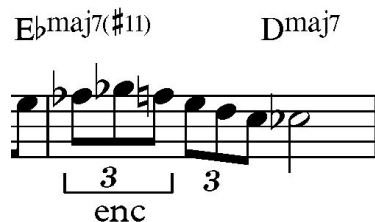
Neighbor Groups/Enclosures

This term is frequently used to describe an ornament of a single chord tone by surrounding it with upper and lower neighbor tones.

“Waltz for Debby” mm. 20



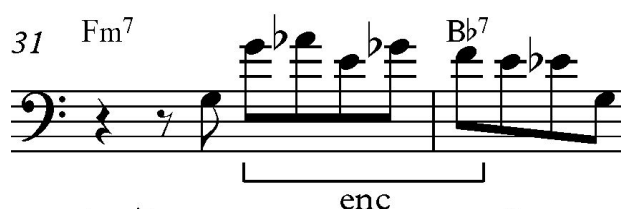
“Gloria’s Step” mm. 27



“Autumn Leaves” mm. 4



“Solar” mm. 31



Delay/Anticipation

Through the use of this device, LaFaro creates tension and release by anticipating or delaying chords. The next example shows a delayed resolution in which LaFaro resolves to the Gm7 chord the third beat of measure 24.

“Waltz for Debby” mm. 23 - 24



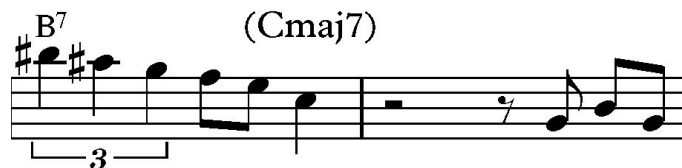
The next example demonstrates again how LaFaro delays a resolution to the first chord at the top of the third chorus of his solo.

“Nardis” mm 64 - 65



Below are examples of how LaFaro anticipates a resolution.

“Nardis” mm. 43 - 44



“Solar” mm 3 - 4



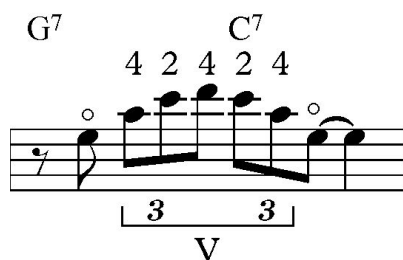
Melodic Formula

Melodic formula #1:

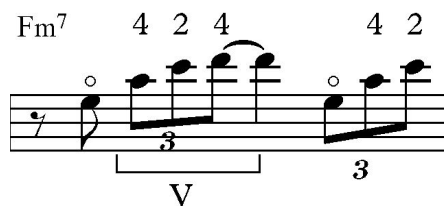
This formula is frequent in LaFaro's solos, especially the ones recorded at the Village Vanguard session. In this formula LaFaro takes advantage of the open G string to articulate this motive in the fifth position of the fingerboard. Each example contains a suggested fingering ...

Fingerboard positions are represented with roman numerals and thumb position as "T.P".

"Waltz for Debby" mm. 4

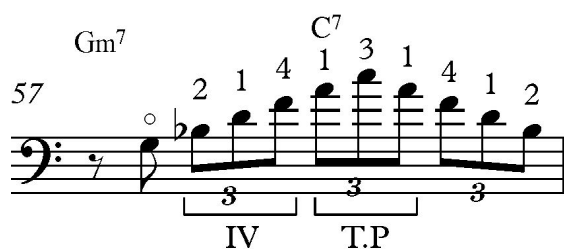


"Gloria's Step" mm. 30



In the next example LaFaro uses the same melodic idea but with different pitches derived from the fourth position. He also goes up to the thumb position elaborating a longer phrase.

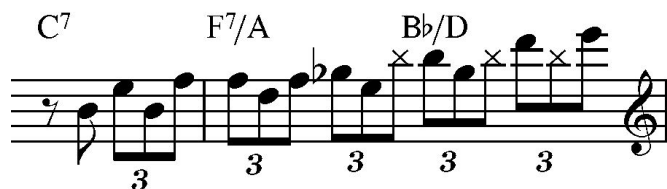
“Waltz for Debby” mm. 57



Melodic Formula #2

LaFaro utilized this pattern as a way to access the high register, in which triplets played between the “G” and “D” strings move through intervals of minor and major thirds and ghost notes.²³

“Waltz for Debby” mm. 44 - 46



“Gloria’s Step” mm. 64 - 65



²³ A “ghost note” is a musical note with a rhythmic value without appreciable pitch.

SECTION 3

CONCLUSION

Scott LaFaro's solo approach shows a high level of virtuosity, rhythmic focus, and musicianship that was uncommon during his time. His melodic lines were uncharacteristically outside of the typical chord changes for a bassist, due to his freedom and application of harmonic devices. His solos on "Autumn Leaves" and "Nardis" are tied to the Bebop language, however they also stretch the language. It is fascinating to see how his solos on the albums recorded at the Village Vanguard display the use of triplets, scalar runs, a high level of dexterity in the upper register, and double time melodies (in slow-tempo tunes).

Despite his untimely death, LaFaro's legacy has been carried through the work of many contemporary bass players such as Gary Peacock, Eddie Gomez, and Marc Johnson. The playing of Eddie Gomez playing most closely resembles LaFaro's style. His performances with the Bill Evans' trio from 1966 to 1977 show a strong influence of LaFaro's conversational concepts and virtuosic melodic ideas. *Intuition* is the album that most accurately demonstrates these ideas. These contemporary players in turn inspire the next generation of bassists to study this fundamental style, working it into their technique and vocabulary, and becoming better musicians because of it.

In my personal experience, working through Scott LaFaro's style has supported the evolution of my technique in numerous ways. For example, I must be able to play quickly if I am to master LaFaro's style. To achieve this dexterity, I found it crucial to practice exercises that develop right-hand plucking agility. I also have experienced that I must have a clear understanding and mastery of thumb position, and create agility when playing scales at fast tempos.

Another essential element of mastering LaFaro's approach is the necessity of taking risks. He pushed the envelope of what the bass is capable of, and broke away from traditional conventions. When I have taken risks inspired by him, such as comping in "broken time feel"²⁴ I have found the approach to be challenging because you must have a strong sense of subdivision and awareness of the collective creation.

Finally, my ultimate take-away from LaFaro's technique is that he would often sacrifice intonation of the pitch in order to play virtuosic lines. If we listen to his some of his solos, especially those recorded at the Vanguard sessions, we notice that the speed at which he played was prioritized over perfect intonation. He played complex rhythmic sequences in thumb position where he was not quite in tune but where he could develop innovative melodic ideas, and play them faster than anyone at the time.

It is essential to explore the legacy of Scott LaFaro. I believe that LaFaro was aware of the richness of his musical output but was most definitely not aware of the monumental contribution he made to the history of jazz bass. This paper aims to set a foundation that will allow for further study of Scott LaFaro's musical legacy. It is imperative for any serious jazz

²⁴ Broken time is often referred as a way of playing in which the beat is not stated explicitly. Especially regarded to bass and drum playing.

bass student to study LaFaro's contributions, explore the way in which he revolutionized the role of the bass, and understand how he developed a soloistic voice. This will allow for individual musical growth that will eventually lead to contribution to and expansion of the evolution of the bass in jazz.

APPENDIX

Autumn Leaves

From *Portraits in Jazz*

Solo choruses played
by Scott LaFaro

Bass line for the solo choruses of "Autumn Leaves" by Scott LaFaro. The key signature is B-flat major (three flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The piece is in 4/4 time. The bass line consists of 40 measures, divided into four systems of ten measures each. The notes are written in bass clef. Chord symbols are placed above the staff at the beginning of each measure or group of measures. Trills are indicated by a small 'tr' above the note. Triplets are indicated by a '3' below the notes.

Chord symbols and measure numbers:

- Measure 1: Cm7
- Measure 2: F7
- Measure 5: Bbmaj7
- Measure 6: Ebmaj7
- Measure 7: Aø7
- Measure 8: D7
- Measure 9: Gm7
- Measure 10: Cm7
- Measure 11: F7
- Measure 12: Bbmaj7
- Measure 14: Ebmaj7
- Measure 15: Aø7
- Measure 16: D7
- Measure 17: Gm(maj7)
- Measure 18: Aø7
- Measure 19: D7
- Measure 20: Gm7
- Measure 21: G7
- Measure 23: Cm7
- Measure 24: F7
- Measure 25: Bbmaj7
- Measure 26: Ebmaj7
- Measure 27: Aø7
- Measure 28: D7
- Measure 29: Gm7
- Measure 30: Gm(maj7)
- Measure 31: Gm6
- Measure 32: Gm7
- Measure 33: Aø7
- Measure 34: D7
- Measure 35: Gm6
- Measure 36: Cm7
- Measure 37: F7
- Measure 38: Bbmaj7
- Measure 39: Ebmaj7
- Measure 40: Aø7

41 Gm(maj7) Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7

46 Ebmaj7 Aø7 D7(b13) Gm7

51 Aø7 D7(b13) Gm7

55 Cm7 F7 Bbmaj7 Ebmaj7 Aø7

60 D7(b13) Gm7 Gm(maj7) Gm7

63 Aø7 D7 Gm7

Nardis

From *Explorations*

Solo choruses played
by Scott LaFaro

Em⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em⁷ B⁷ Cmaj⁷ Am⁷

6 Fmaj⁷ Em⁷ B⁷alt. Em⁷(b⁹) Fmaj⁷ Em⁷

11 B⁷ Cmaj⁷ Am⁷ Cmaj¹³(#11) Em⁷

16 Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ Dm⁷

22 G⁷ Cmaj⁷ B⁷(#11) Em⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em⁷

27 B⁷ Cmaj⁷ Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ B⁷ Em⁷

32 Em⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em⁷ B⁷(b¹³) Cmaj⁷

37 Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em⁷ B⁷alt.

41 Em⁷ Fmaj⁷ B⁷ Cmaj⁷

The musical score for Nardis is presented in a system of eight staves. The first seven staves are in bass clef, and the eighth staff is in treble clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score includes various chords such as Em⁷, Fmaj⁷, B⁷, Cmaj⁷, Am⁷, B⁷alt., Em⁷(b⁹), Cmaj¹³(#11), G⁷, B⁷(#11), B⁷(b¹³), and Dm⁷. The notation includes triplets, slurs, and other musical symbols. The measure numbers 6, 11, 16, 22, 27, 32, 37, and 41 are indicated at the beginning of their respective staves.

45 Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em⁷ Am⁷

50 Fmaj⁷ Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ Dm⁷

54 G⁷ Cmaj⁷ B⁷(#11) Em⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em⁷

59 B⁷ Cmaj⁷ Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ B⁷ Em⁷

64 Em⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em⁷ B⁷ Cmaj⁷

69 Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em(maj⁷) B⁷alt. Em⁷

74 Fmaj⁷ Em⁷ B⁷(b9) Cmaj⁷ Am⁷

78 Fmaj⁷ Em⁷ Am⁷

82 Fmaj⁷ Am⁷ Fmaj⁷ Dm⁷

86 G⁷ Cmaj⁷ B⁷ Em⁷ Fmaj⁷ Em⁷

91 B⁷ C^{maj7} Am⁷

94 B^{7alt.} Em⁷ Bill solo starts

91 B⁷ C^{maj7} Am⁷

94 B^{7alt.} Em⁷ Bill solo starts

Waltz for Debby

From *Waltz for Debby*

Solo choruses played
by Scott LaFaro

Am⁷ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ A⁷ D⁷ G⁷ C⁷ F⁷/A B^b/D

6 G^ø7 C⁷ Am⁷ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ Am⁷ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷

11 A⁷ D⁷ G⁷ C⁷ A⁷ D⁷ B⁷ E⁷

15 Amaj⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ Am⁷ D⁷

19 Gm⁷ A⁷ Dm⁷ F⁷ B^bmaj⁷ A⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷

23 A^bmaj⁷ D^bmaj⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ Am⁷ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷

27 A⁷ D⁷ G⁷ C⁷ F⁷/A B^b/D G^ø7 C⁷

31 Am⁷ Dm⁷ Bm⁷ E⁷ Am⁷ F⁷ B^bmaj⁷ A⁷alt. Dm⁷

36 G⁷ A^bø⁷ Am⁷ D⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ F⁶ Dm⁷

The musical score is written for bass and treble staves. It features a variety of chords including Am⁷, Dm⁷, Gm⁷, C⁷, A⁷, D⁷, G⁷, F⁷/A, B^b/D, G^ø7, Amaj⁷, B^bmaj⁷, A⁷alt., and F⁶. The score includes several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' and a bracket) and a double bar line at measure 11. The key signature changes from one flat (B-flat) to two flats (B-flat and E-flat) at measure 11.

40 Gm⁷ C⁷ Am⁷ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷

43 A⁷ D⁷ G⁷ C⁷ F⁷/A B^b/D G^{ø7} C⁷

47 Am⁷ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ Am⁷ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷

51 A⁷ D⁷ G⁷ C⁷ A⁷ D⁷ B⁷ E⁷

55 Amaj⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ Am⁷ D⁷

59 Gm⁷ A⁷ Dm⁷ F⁷ B^bmaj⁷ A⁷ Dm⁷ G⁷

63 A^bmaj⁷ D^bmaj⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ Am⁷ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ A⁷ D⁷

68 G⁷ C⁷ F⁷/A B^b/D G^{ø7} C⁷ Am⁷ Dm⁷

72 Bm⁷ E⁷ Am⁷ F⁷ B^bmaj⁷ A⁷alt. Dm⁷

76 G⁷ A^bo⁷ Am⁷ D⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷

79 F⁶ Dm⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷

3 3

Gloria's Step

From *Live at the Village Vanguard*

Solo choruses played
By Scott LaFaro

The musical score for "Gloria's Step" is written in 4/4 time and consists of a single bass line. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 24, and 28 marked at the beginning of their respective lines. Chords are indicated above the staff, and triplets are marked with a '3' and a bracket. The chords and their positions are as follows:

- Measure 1: Fmaj7
- Measure 2: E♭maj7
- Measure 3: Dmaj7
- Measure 4: D♭maj7
- Measure 5: C7(#9)
- Measure 6: Fm7
- Measure 7: Fmaj7
- Measure 8: E♭maj7
- Measure 9: Dmaj7
- Measure 10: C7(#9)
- Measure 11: Fm7
- Measure 12: A♭7
- Measure 13: E♭7
- Measure 14: G♭7
- Measure 15: D♭7
- Measure 16: F♭7
- Measure 17: E♭maj7(b5)
- Measure 18: A13(#11)
- Measure 19: Fmaj7
- Measure 20: E♭maj7
- Measure 21: Dmaj7
- Measure 22: D♭maj7
- Measure 23: C7(#9)
- Measure 24: Fm7
- Measure 25: Fmaj7
- Measure 26: E♭maj7
- Measure 27: Dmaj7
- Measure 28: D♭maj7
- Measure 29: C7(#9)
- Measure 30: Fm7

31 $E\flat m7$ $F\flat maj7$ $A\flat 7$ $E\flat 7$

35 $G\flat 7$ $D\flat 7$ $F\flat 7$

38 $E\flat maj7(b5)$ $A^{13}(\sharp 11)$ $F\flat maj7$

42 $E\flat maj7$ $D\flat maj7$ $D\flat maj7$ $C7(\sharp 9)$ $F\flat m7$ $F\flat maj7$

47 $E\flat maj7$ $D\flat maj7$ $D\flat maj7$ $C7(\sharp 9)$ $F\flat m7$ $E\flat m7$

52 $F\flat maj7$ $A\flat m7$ $E\flat 7$ $G\flat 7$ $D\flat 7$

57 $F\flat 7$ $E\flat maj7(b5)$ $A^{13}(\sharp 11)$

61 $F\flat maj7$ $E\flat maj7$ $D\flat maj7$ $D\flat maj7$ $C7(\sharp 9)$

65 $F\flat m7$ $F\flat maj7$ $E\flat maj7$ $D\flat maj7$ $D\flat maj7$

69 $C7(\sharp 9)$ $F\flat m7$ $E\flat m7$ $F\flat maj7$

73 $A\emptyset^7$ $E\emptyset^7$ $G\emptyset^7$

76 $D\emptyset^7$ $F\emptyset^7$ $E^{maj7(b5)}$

79 $A^{13}(\sharp 11)$

Solar

From *Live at the Village Vanguard*

Six solo choruses played
by Scott LaFaro

Chord progression for the first six solo choruses of "Solar" by Scott LaFaro:

Chords: Cm(maj7), Cm7, Gø7, C7, Fmaj7, Fm7, Bb7, Ebmaj7, Ebm7, Ab7, Dbmaj7, Dø7, G7(b9), Cm(maj7), Cm7, Gø7, C7, Fmaj7, Fm7, Bb7, Ebmaj7, Ebm7, Ab7, Dbmaj7, Dø7, G7(b9), Cm(maj7), Cm7, Gø7, C7, Fmaj7, Fm7, Bb7, Ebmaj7, Ebm7, Ab7, Dbmaj7, Dø7, G7(b9), Cm(maj7), Cm7.

40 $G\emptyset^7$ C^7 F^{maj7} Fm^7 Bb^7

45 $Ebmaj^7$ Ebm^7 Ab^7 $Dbmaj^7$ $D\emptyset^7$ $G^7(b9)$

49 $Cm(maj^7)$ Cm^7 $G\emptyset^7$ C^7

53 F^{maj7} Fm^7 Bb^7

57 $Ebmaj^7$ Ebm^7 Ab^7 $Dbmaj^7$ $D\emptyset^7$ $G^7(b9)$

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