# Leading with Style:

## How to simplify teaching jazz improvisation

# A bit about me

- Trombone professor at the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam since 2020
- Grew up studying with freelance musicians in Los Angeles
- Exposed to, enjoyed, and learned a variety of musical styles
- Experienced a difference in quality between jazz in public school education versus jazz in community program, Jazz America
- Those experiences informed me on my approach to teaching music and especially improvisation

# What we will explore today

- The “Rules” of Voice Leading/Part Writing
  - And how those “Rules” help us understand the ***Changes*** that are integral to jazz and jazz improvisation
- Applying those Rules to improvising in the Blues
  - Basic melody writing
  - Creating **lines** via “approach tones”
  - Musical puzzle-solving examples of each of the above
- Scaling up these principles beyond the blues to other tunes of more complexity
  - Approach tone Standards
  - Historical examples of this approach

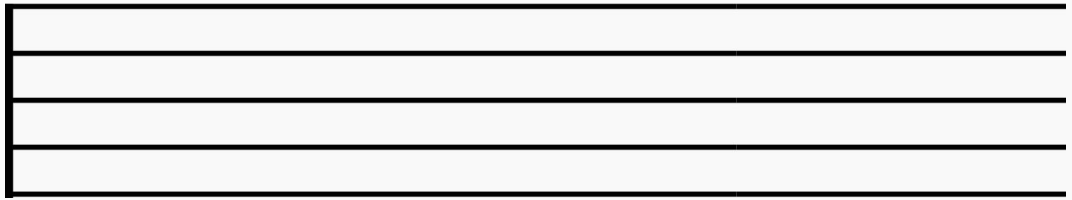
# What we will NOT explore today

- Elements of informed jazz style
  - i.e. How to swing with
    - Rhythm
    - Volume
    - Sound
- Comping
- Jazz Harmony
- Soloing on non-single voice instruments

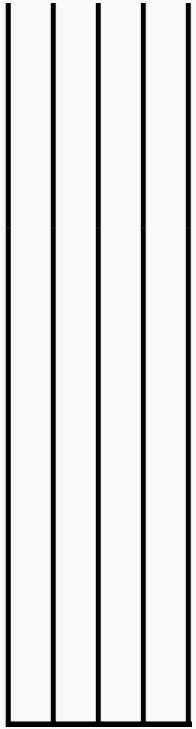
# 01
# The "Rules"

How voice leading helps us understand the **Changes**

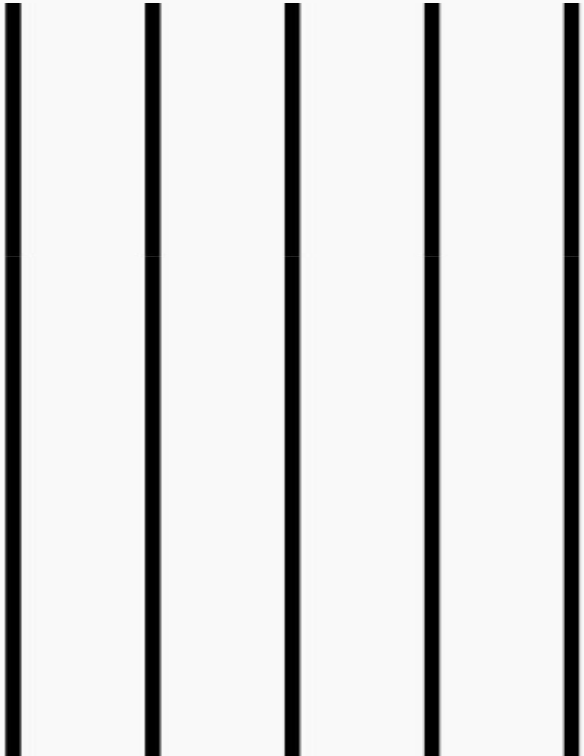
# Let's Imagine...



# Let's Imagine...

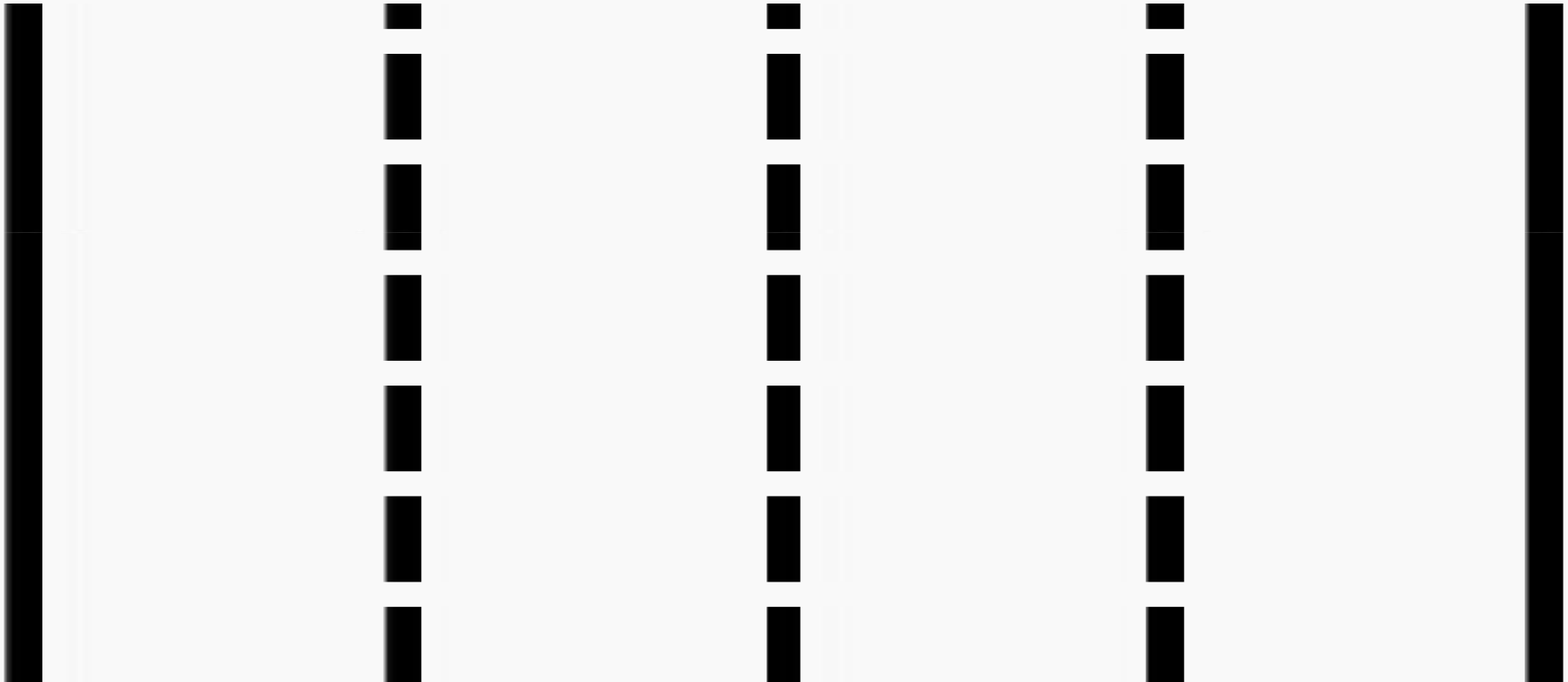


# Let's Imagine...

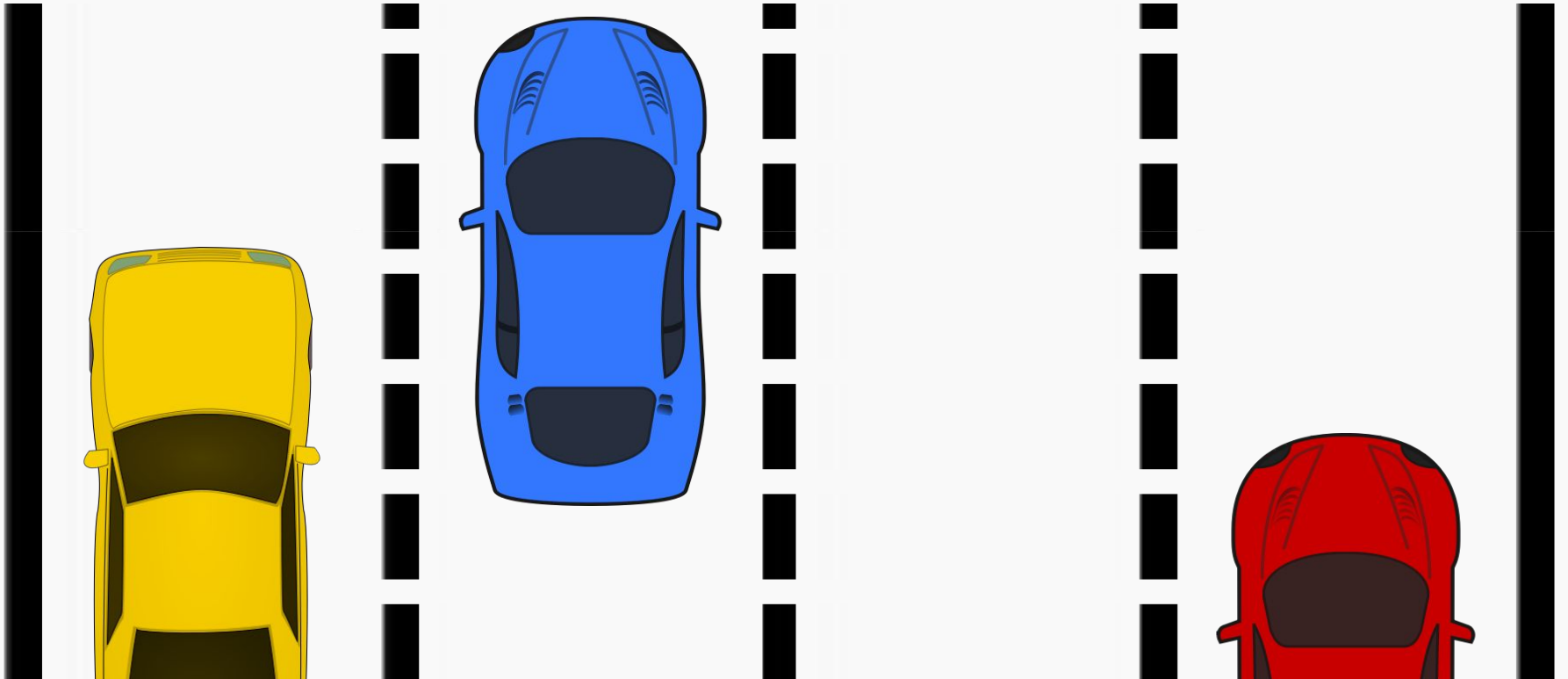


# Let's Imagine...

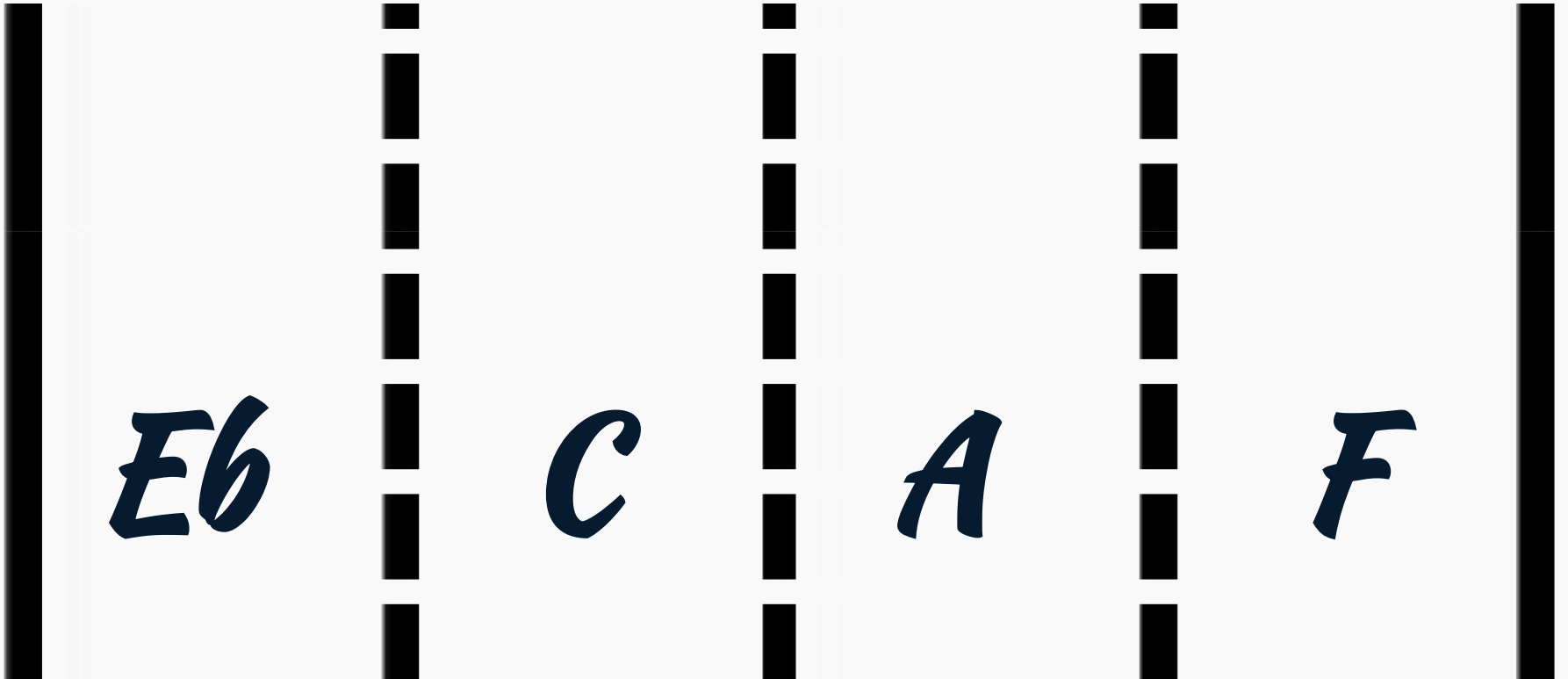
# Let's Imagine...



# Let's Imagine...



# Highway F7

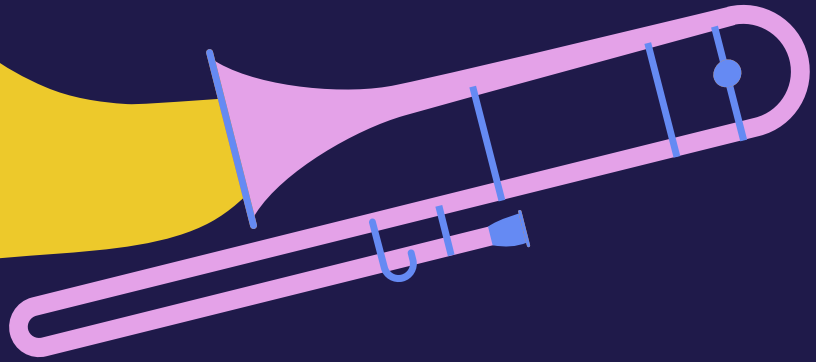


# Great HS Improvisers

# Coltrane

That beginner feeling...

# The "Rules"



## #1

Keep the common tones between two chords

## #2

Move by step if #1 cannot happen

## #3

No leaps more than a 3rd

## #4

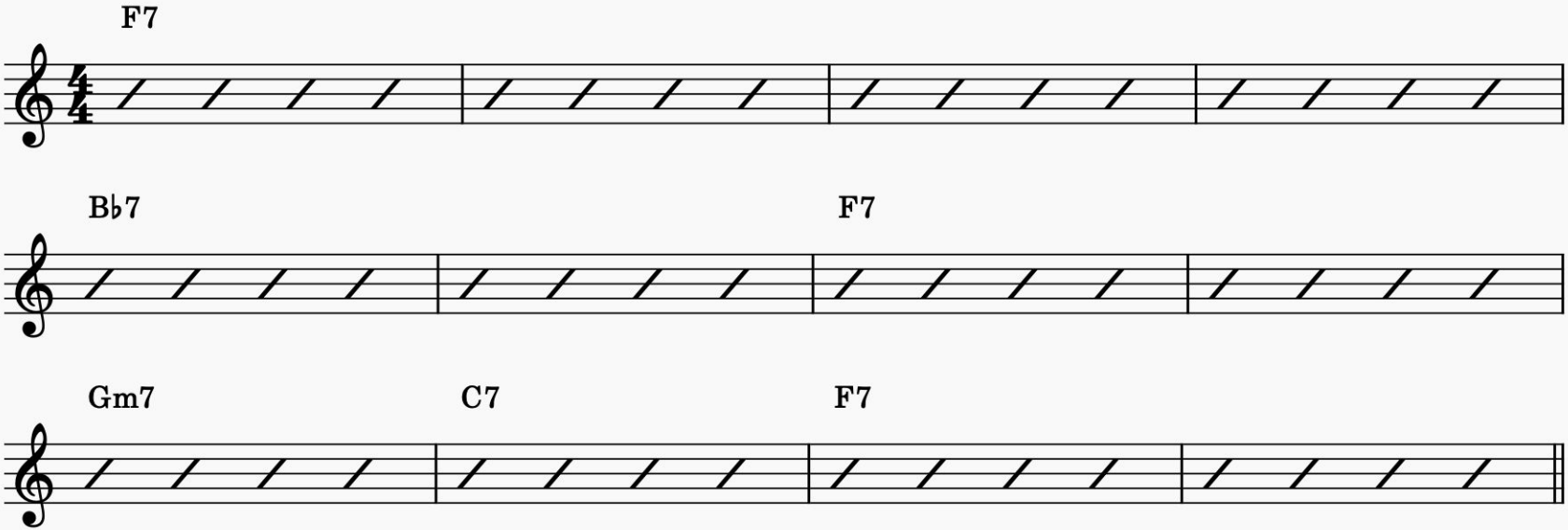
Consecutive leaps outline a chord

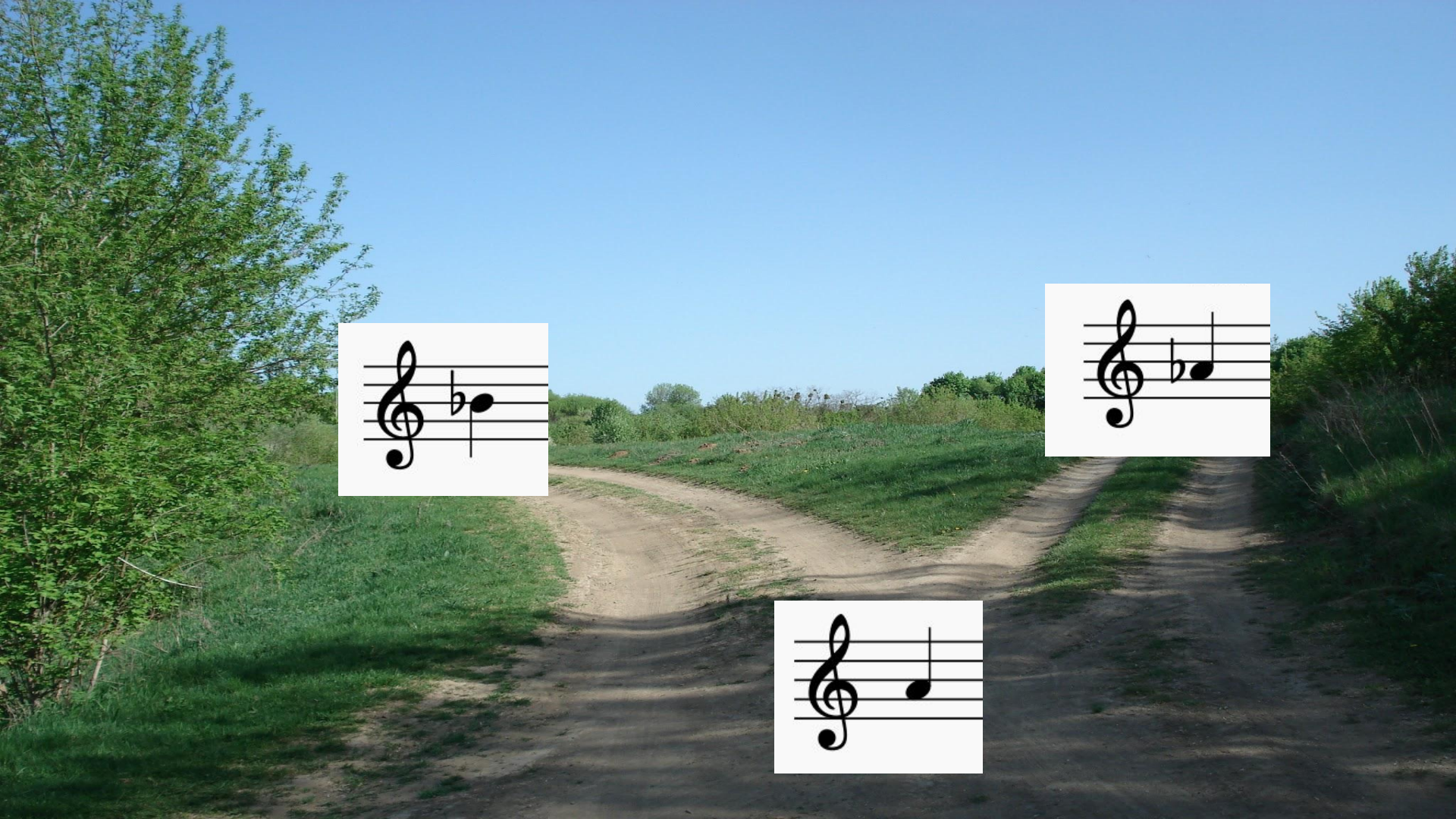
# 02

# Applying The "Rules"

Via the Blues form

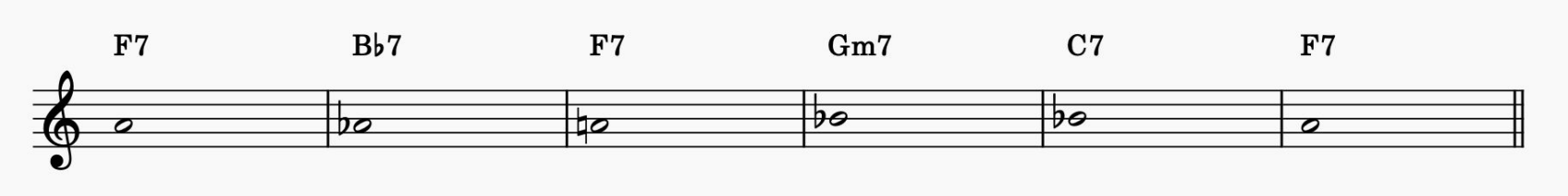
# The Blues in F



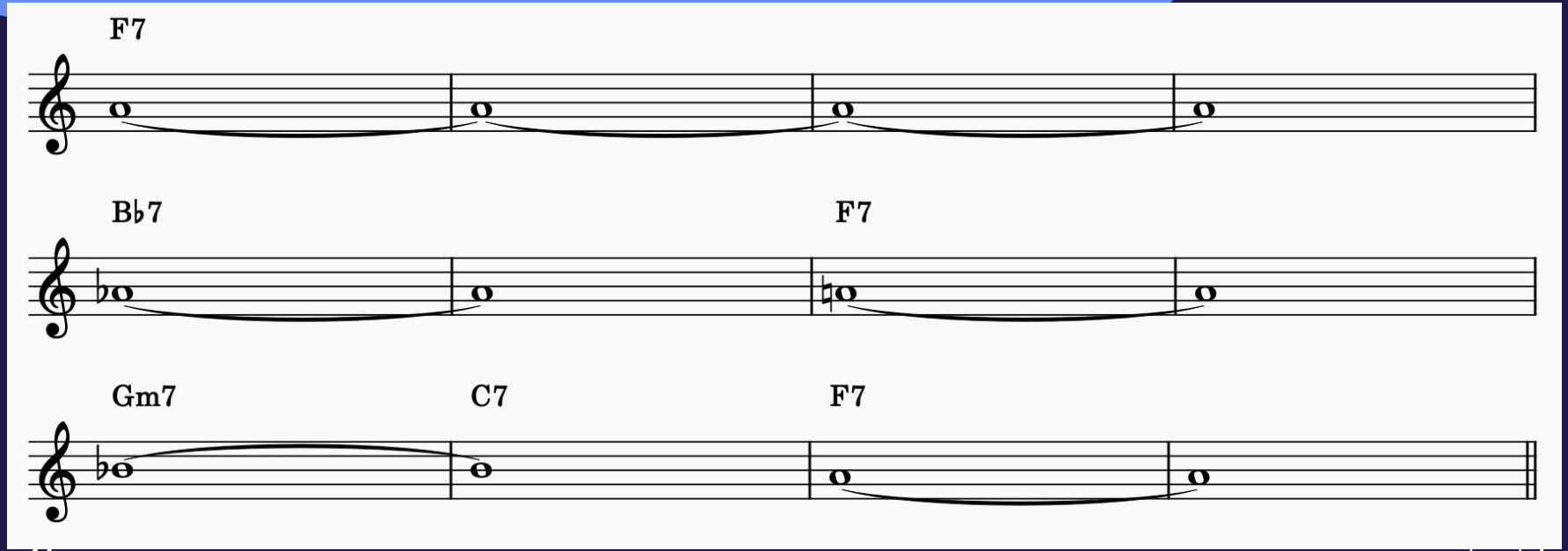


# Change the melody to play the Changes

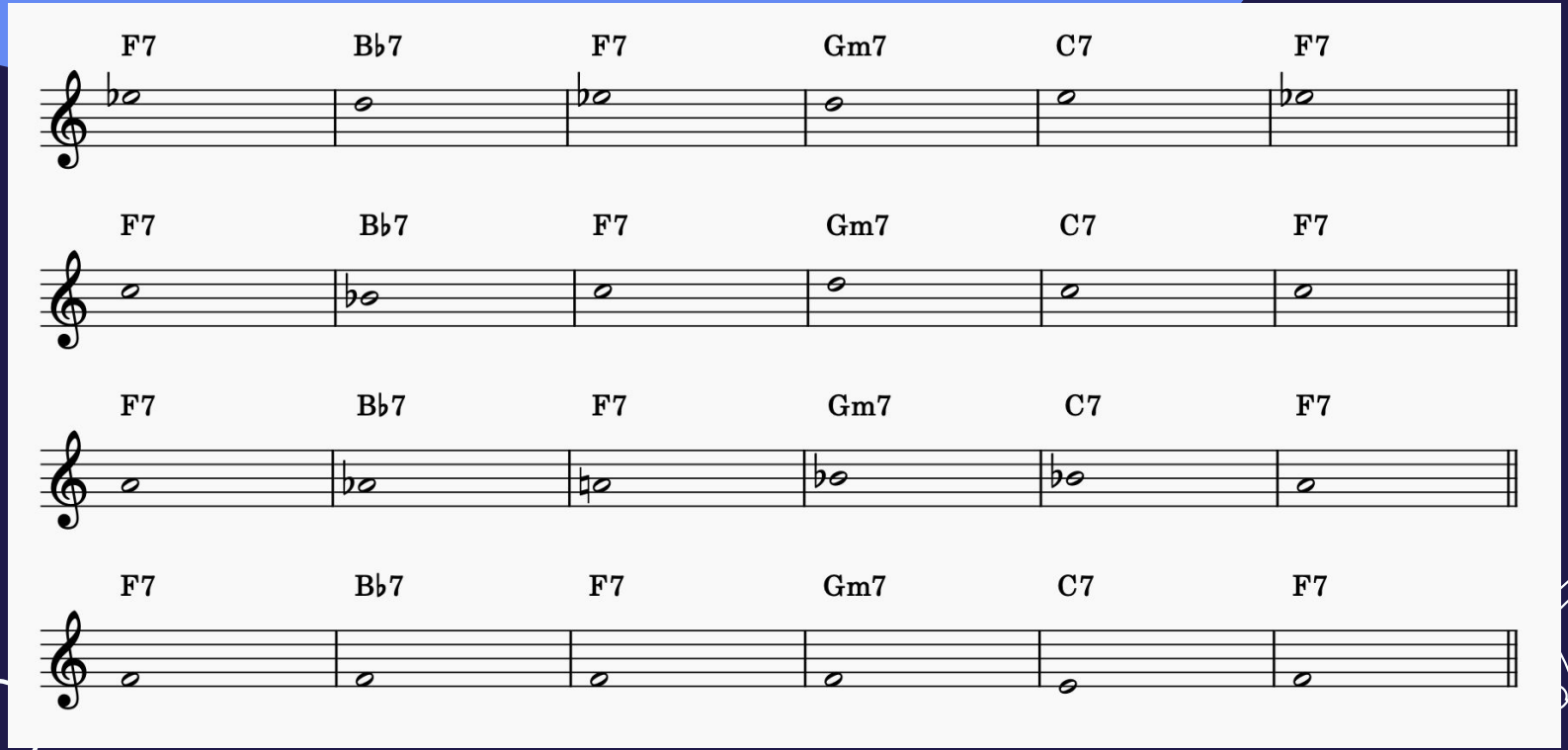
# Movement by chord

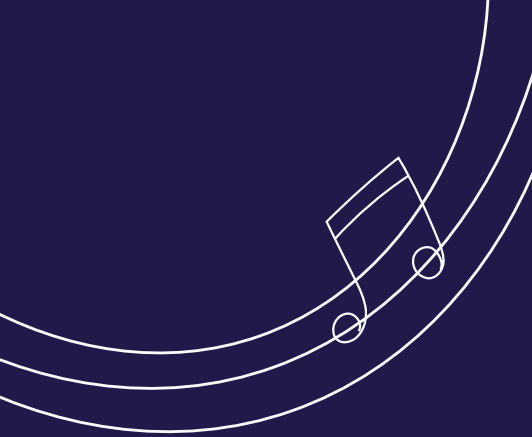


# The Blues in F



# Movement by chord



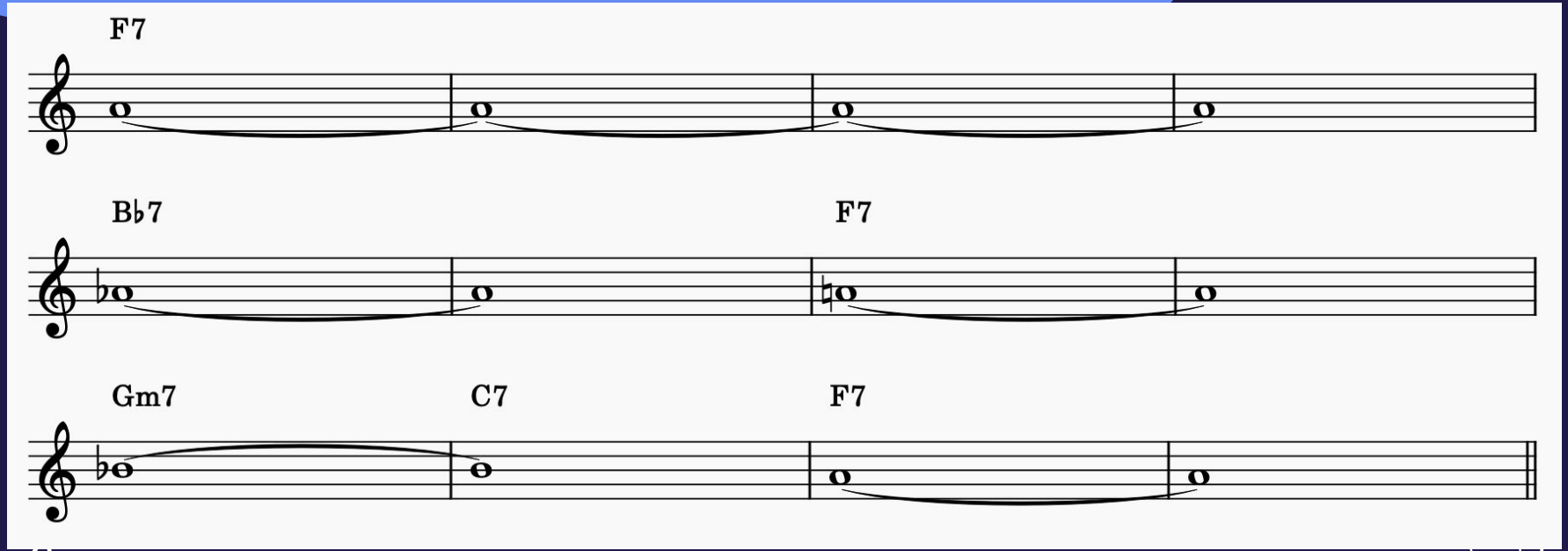


But how do I

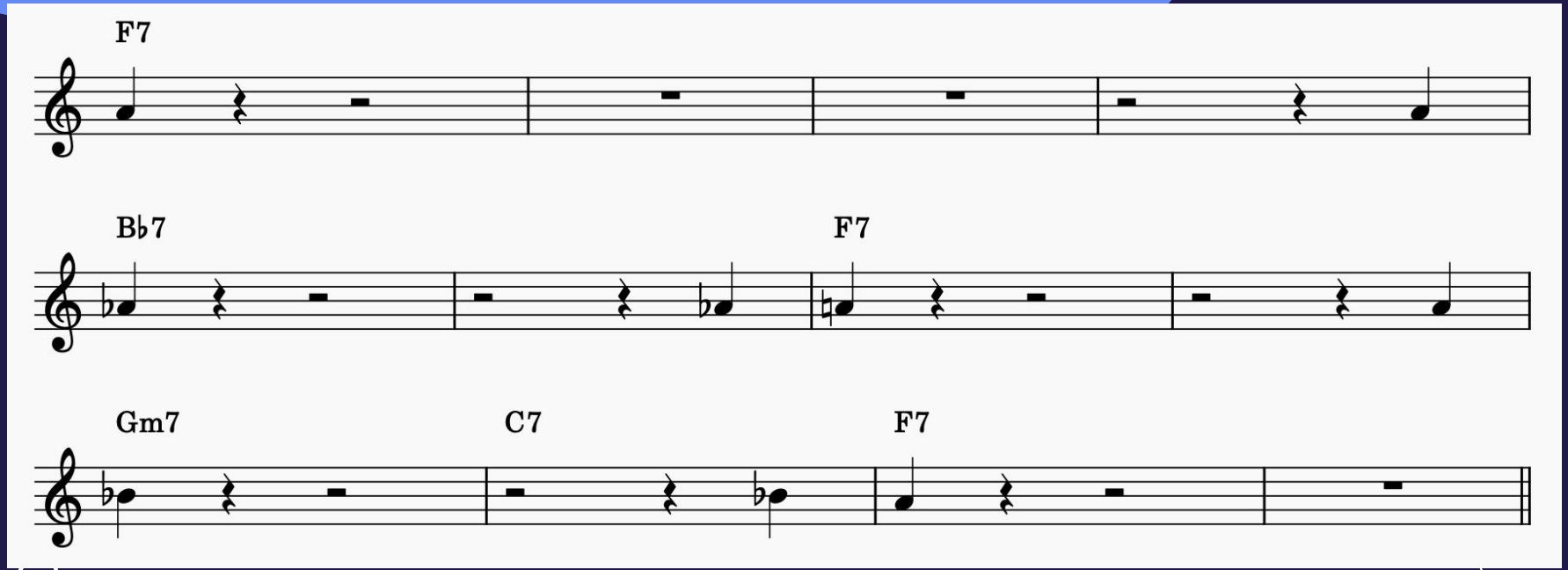
Jazz?

# Approach Tones!

# The Blues in F



# The Blues in F



# Some Embellishments

## Neighboring Tones

Stepwise motion away and back to the same target note

## Passing Tones

Stepwise motion to the target note from another chord tone

## Appoggiaturas/Escape Tones

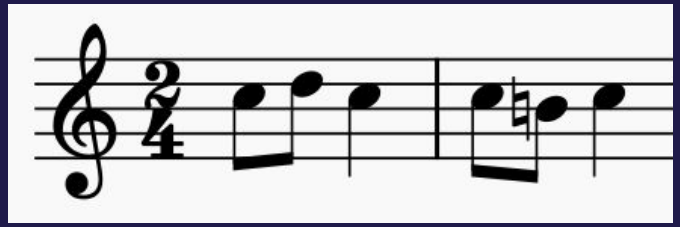
A leap followed by a step to the target note and vice versa

## Enclosures/Double Neighbor

Approaching a target note via neighboring tones on both sides

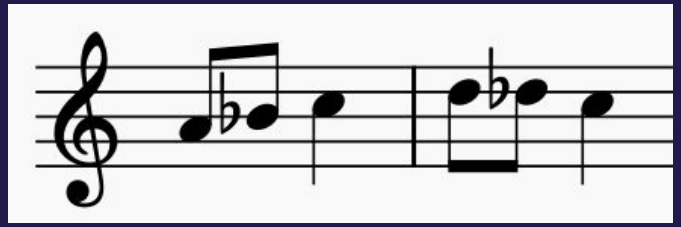
## Neighboring Tones

Stepwise motion away and back to the same target note



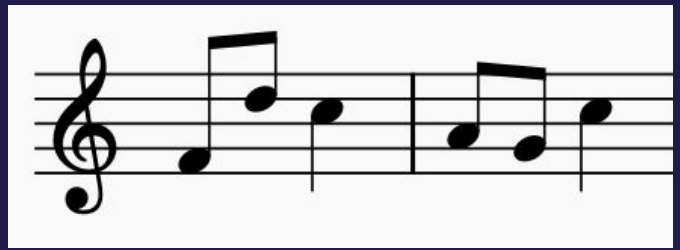
## Passing Tones

Stepwise motion to the target note from another chord tone



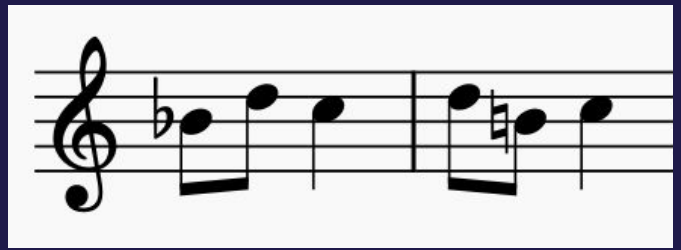
## Appoggiaturas/Escape Tones

A leap followed by a step to the target note and vice versa

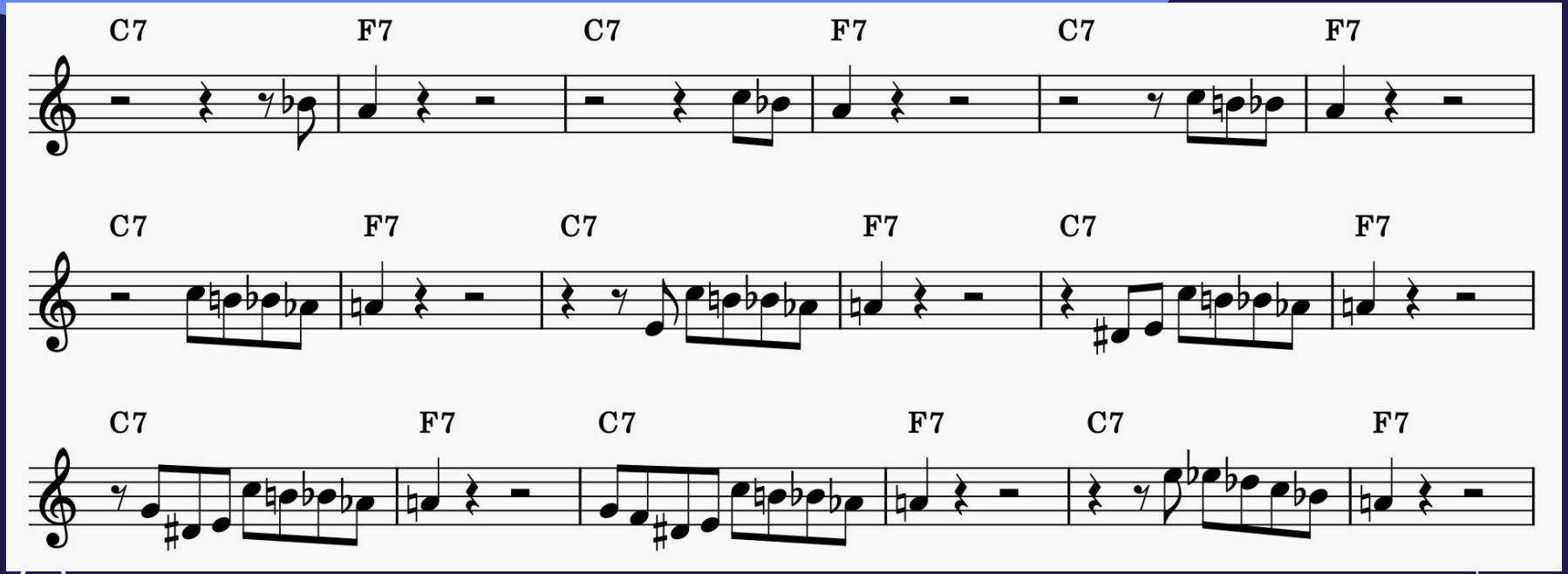


## Enclosures/Double Neighbor

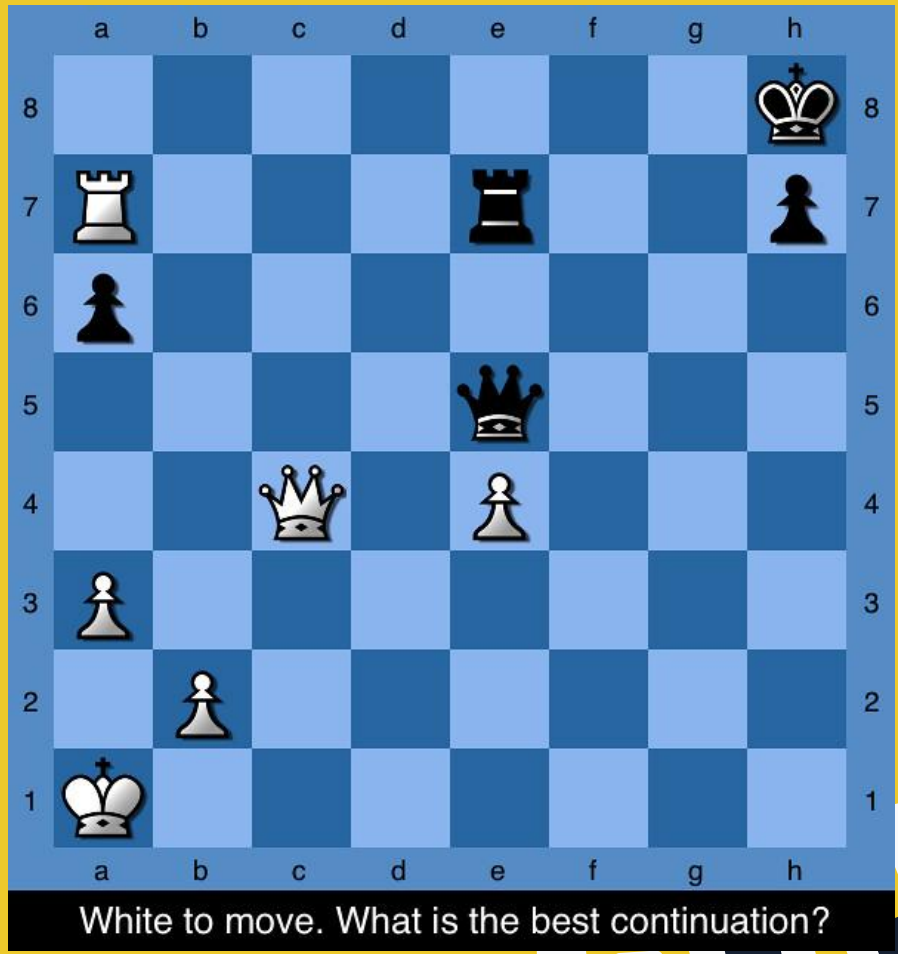
Approaching a target note via neighboring tones on both sides



# Approach Tones



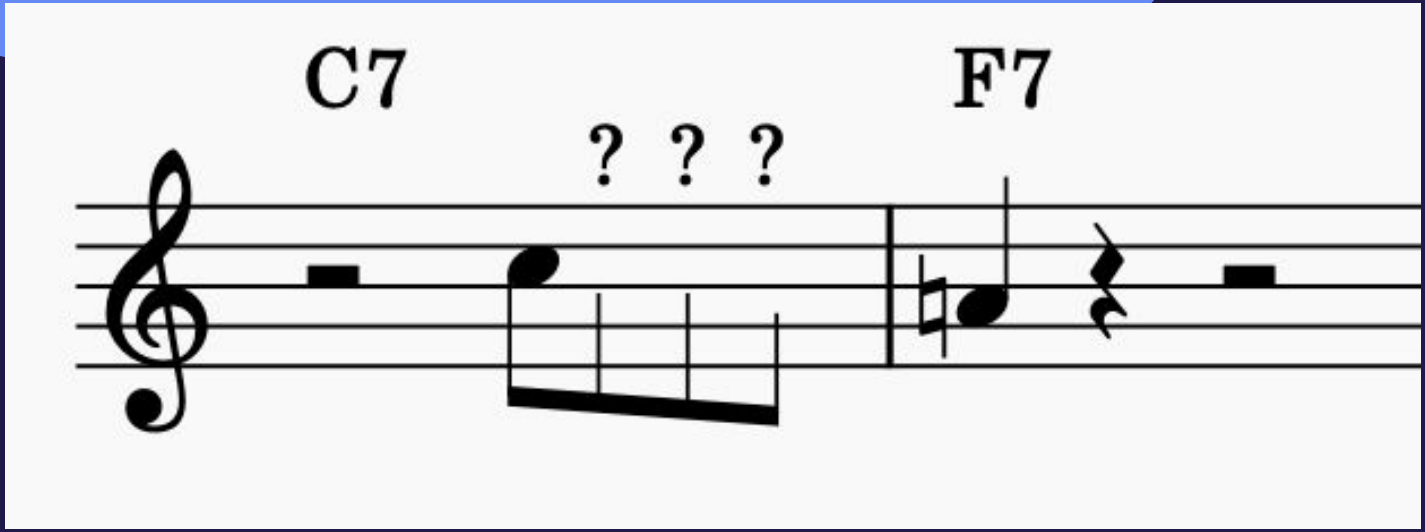
Approach tones can be thought of as musical puzzles in rhythm


a b c d e f g h
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
White to move. What is the best continuation?

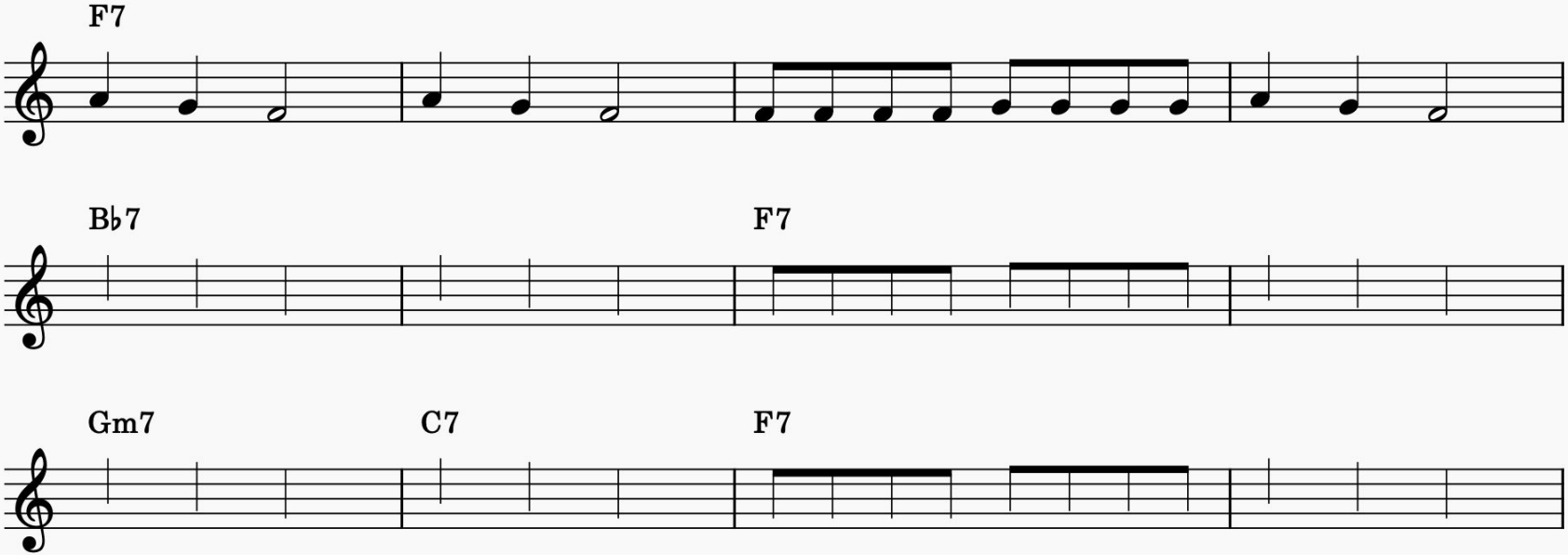
# The Coltrane of Chess

## Hikaru Nakamura

# Approach Tone "Puzzle"



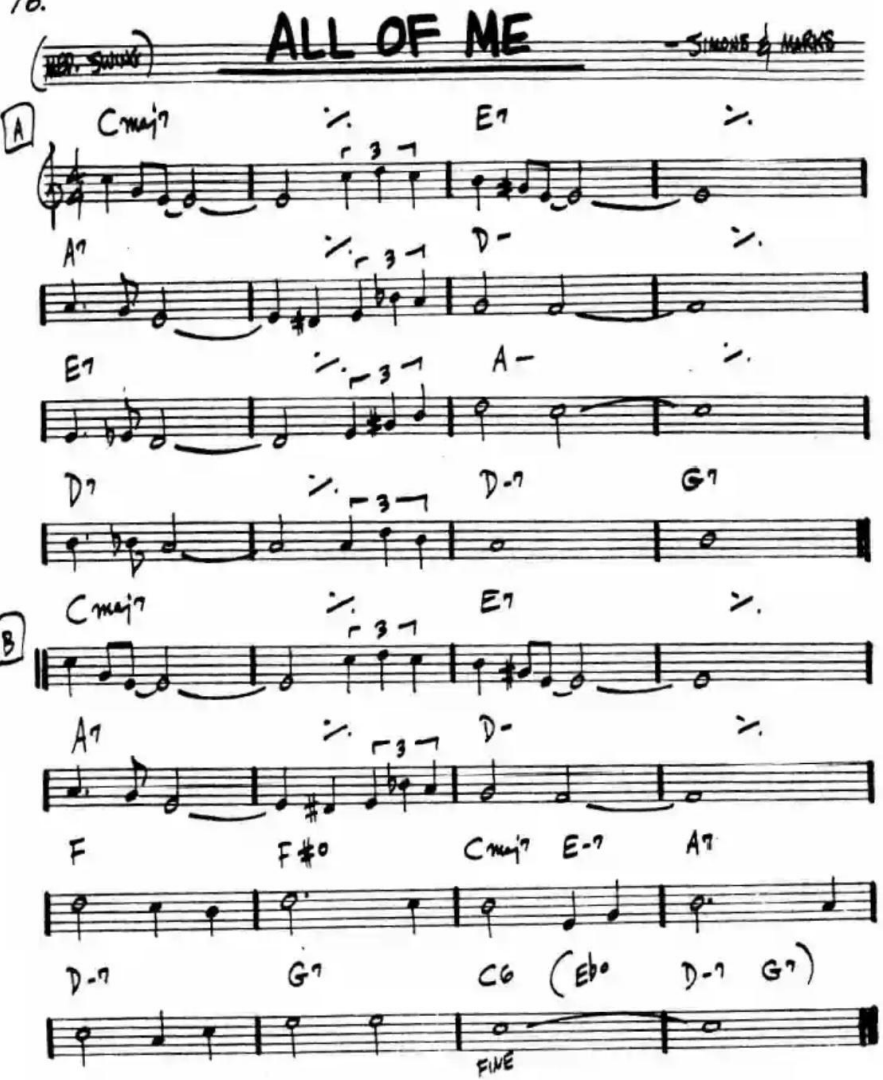
# Approach Tone "Puzzle"

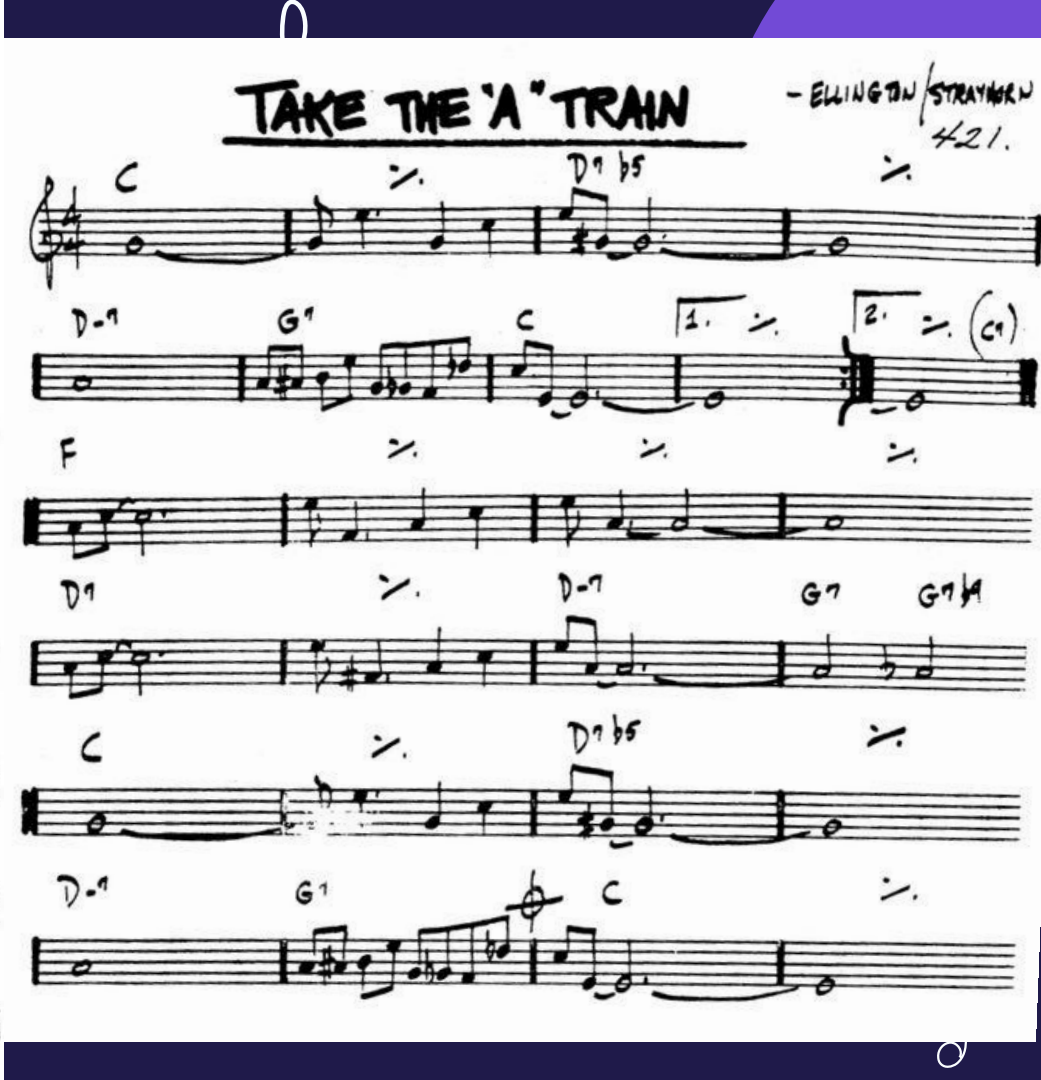


# 03

# Scaling Things Up

Looking to more complex tunes and jazz artists for inspiration


ALL OF ME
- SIMONS & MARKS
A
Cmaj7
E7
A7
D-
E7
A-
D7
D-7
G7
B
Cmaj7
E7
A7
D-
F
F#o
Cmaj7
E-7
A7
D-7
G7
C6
(Eb°
D-7
G7)
FINE


TAKE THE "A" TRAIN
- ELLINGTON / STRAYHORN
421.
C
D7 b5
D-7
G7
C
1.
2.
(C7)
F
D7
D-7
G7
G7 b9
C
D7 b5
D-7
G7
C

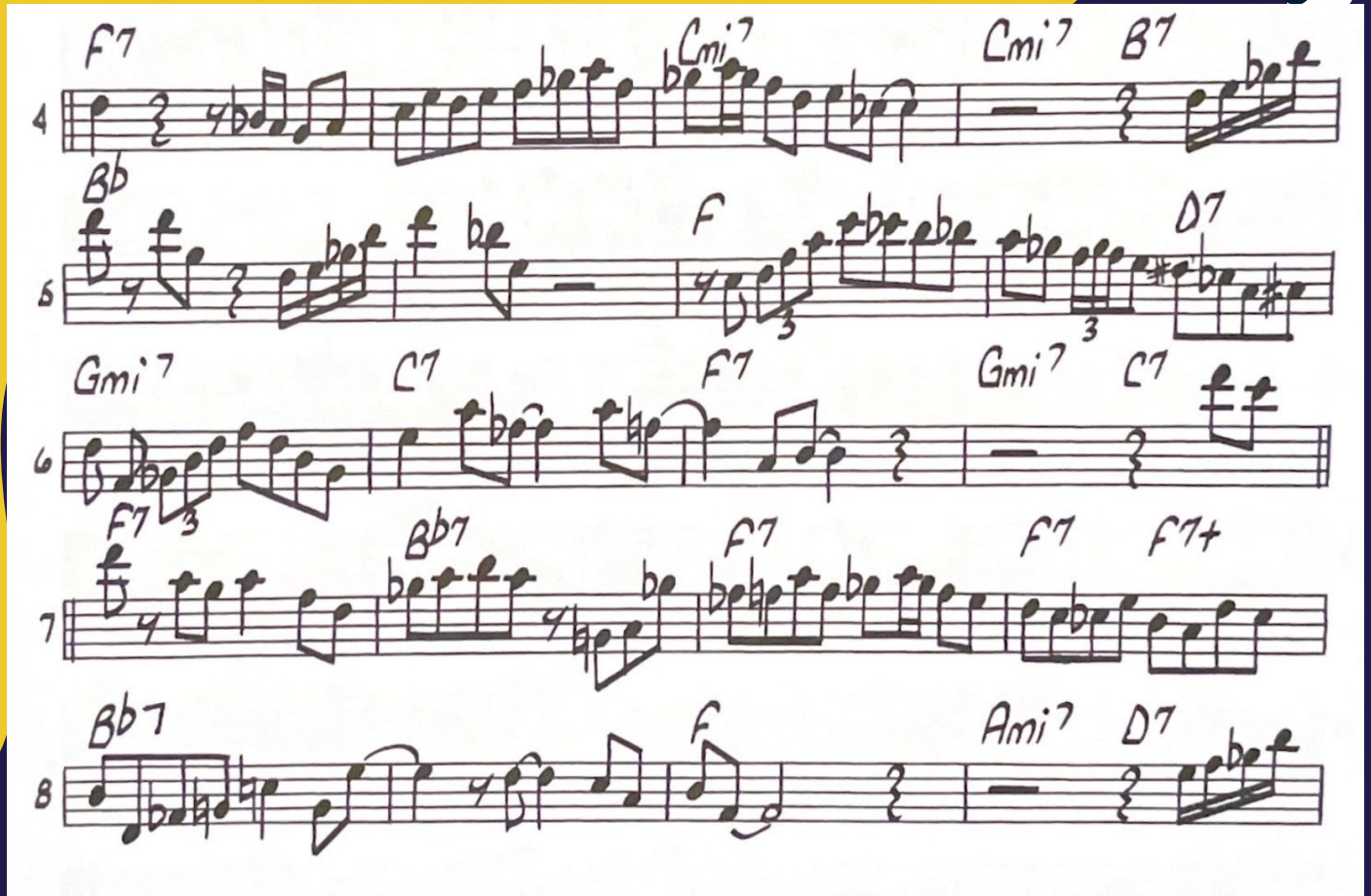
# Typical advice:

## Use the melody

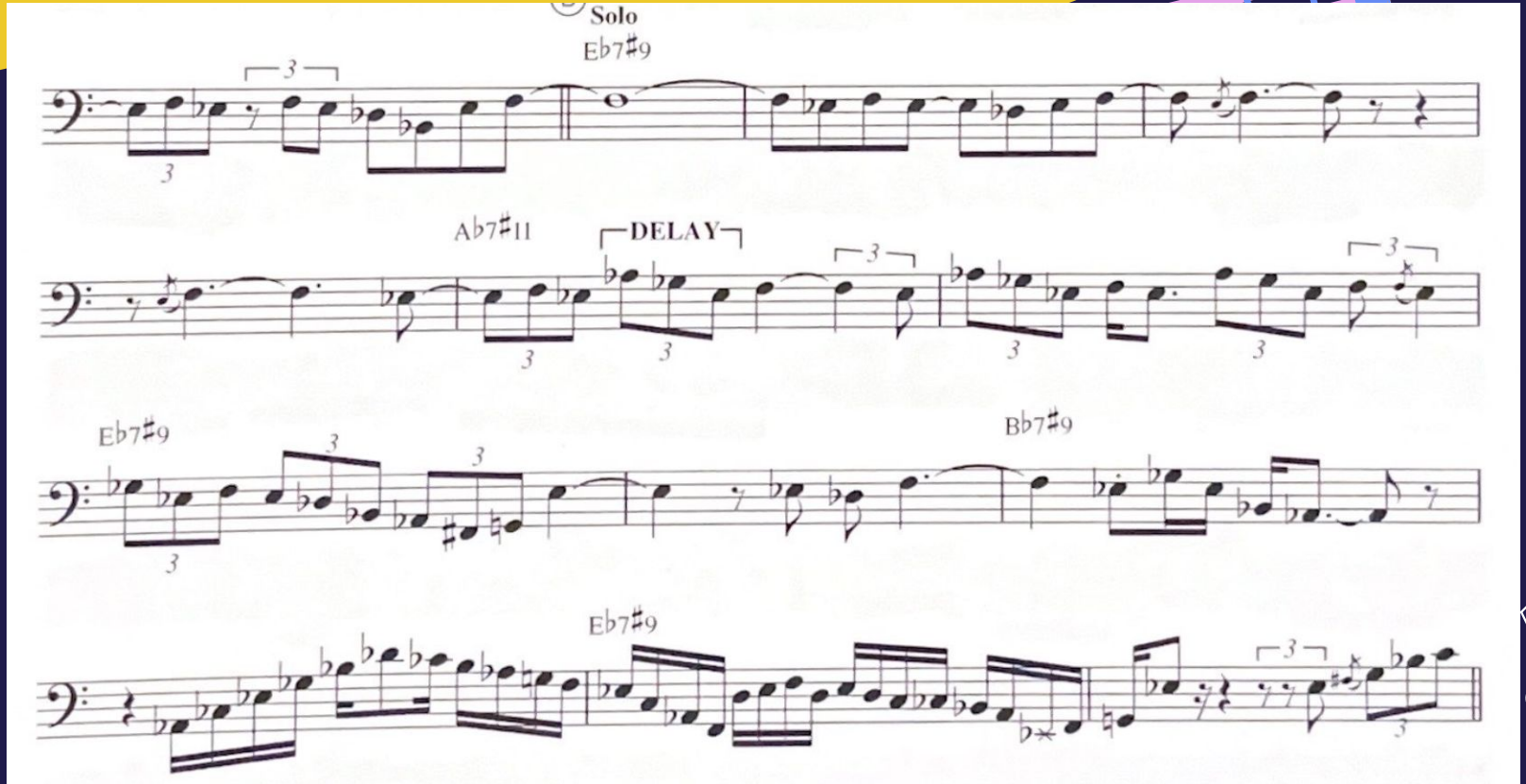
The melody can be used as a tool to help improvising. Start by using the melody as a framework and slowly exploring notes around it. Good because:

- Has voice leading lines built into the melody
- Notes outside of those tend to be in the key of the song
- Helps give a simple starting place with a written visual

# Charlie Parker's Solo on Au Privave



# John Coltrane's Solo on Blue Trane



# Additional strategies

## Listening!

Listen often and listen in a variety of ways, including live concerts, recorded albums, the same song over and over (aka deep listening), etc.

## Transcriptions

Learning to play solos by ear, writing them down, or playing from transcriptions books. The more you do yourself, the deeper it sinks in and the longer it stays with you.

## Play-along and other books

A variety of resources exist out there that allow someone to follow along and participate on their own time.

# Other methods for improv

## 01 The Blues Scale

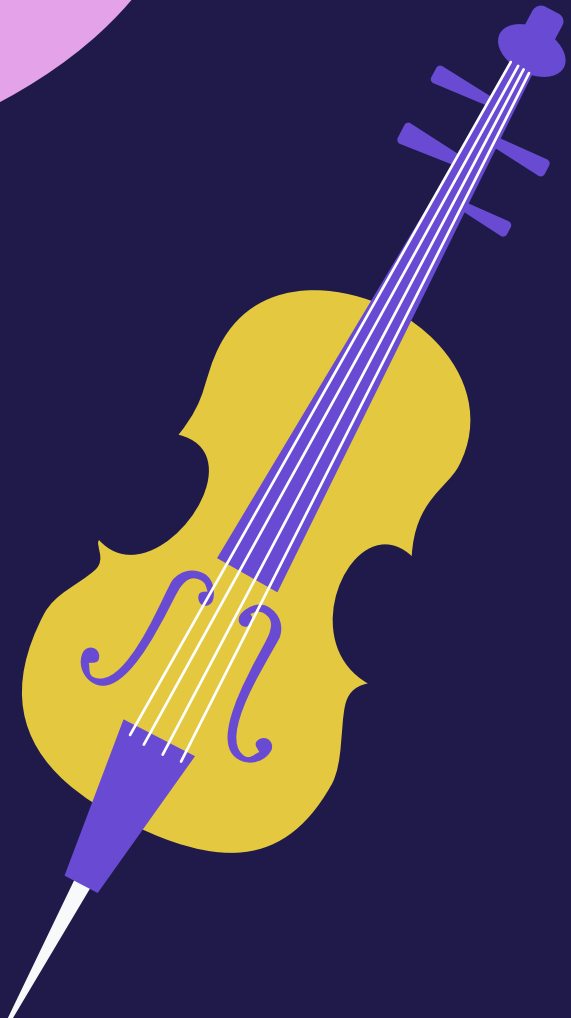
Great for introducing and getting students interested in playing jazz. Not  the most helpful for learning the changes and how to navigate

## 02 Scales/Arpeggios

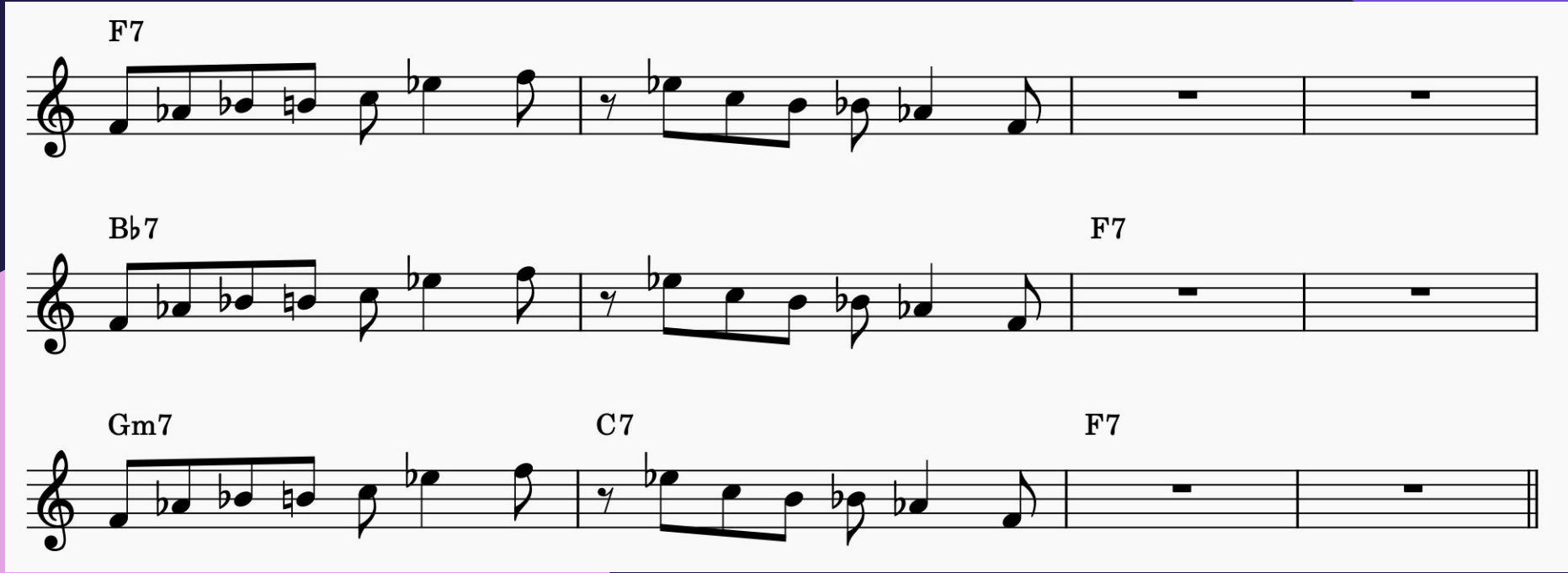
Looking at the various arpeggios and scales that you can play over and practicing them

## 03 Patterns/Licks

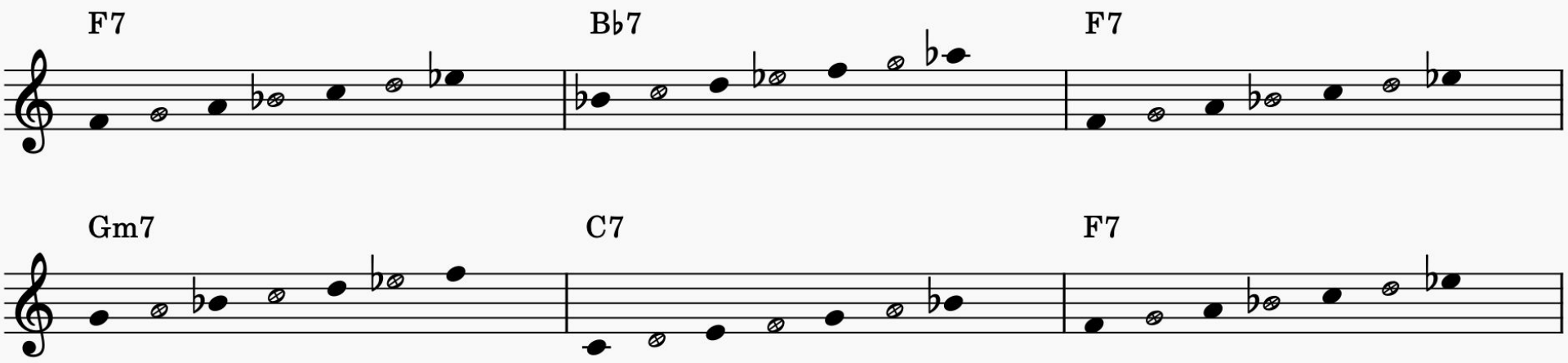
Great for wanting to seem knowledgeable, but can be limiting if you don't explore why those patterns or licks sound so good in the first place



# The Blues Scale

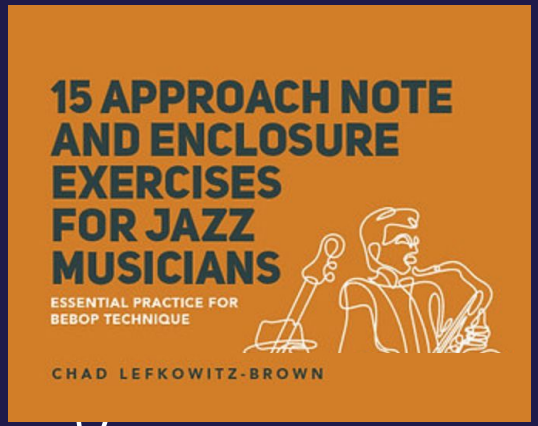


# Scales/Arpeggios



# Resources

## Approach Tones



## Practice Tools

iREAL PRO

JAZZBOOKS.com
JAMEY AEBERSOLD JAZZ • SINCE 1967

# Questions?

# Thank you!

Reach out any time, happy to chat and answer any questions you may have!

hernaccf@potsdam.edu
+1 (315) 267-2452
www.chrishernacki..com

CREDITS: This presentation template was created by **Slidesgo**, including icons by **Flaticon**, and infographics & images by **Freepik**