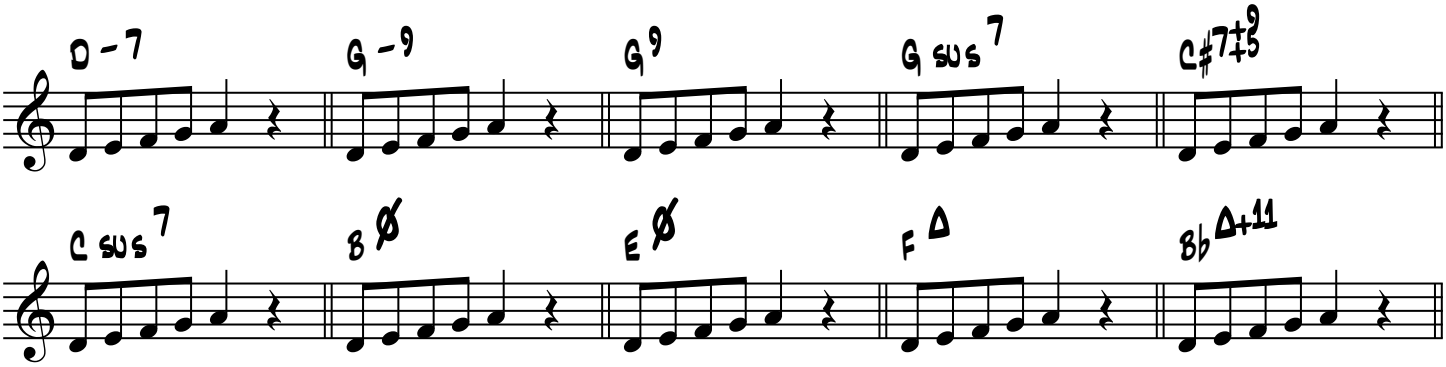
Magic Motives

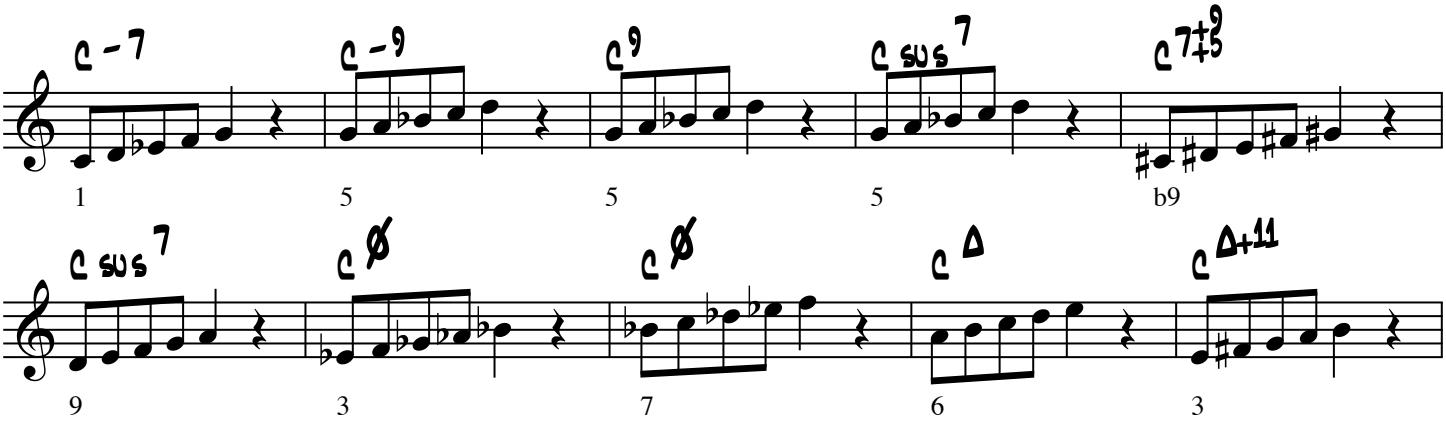
Part 1
Five-Note Minor Scales

1. Applications

Here is a five-note D minor scale shown with chord symbols indicating all of its applications. Note its structure: whole-step, half-step, whole-step, whole-step.



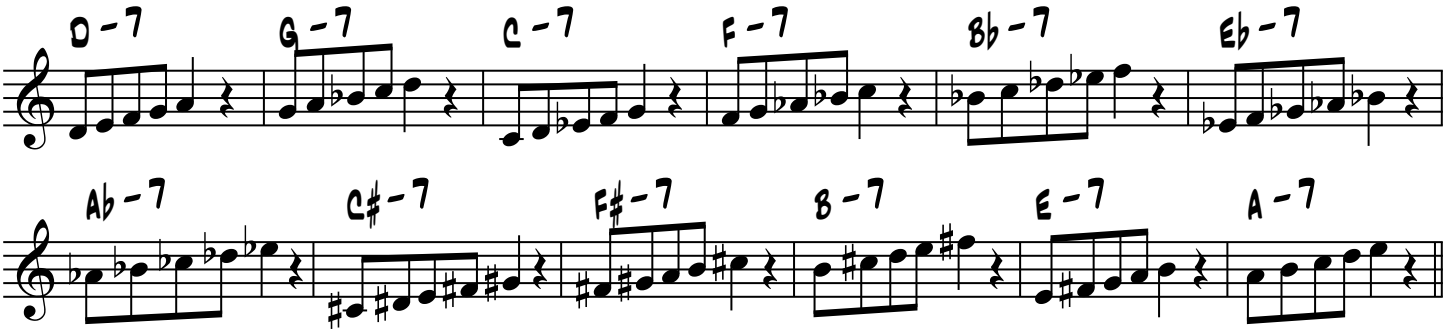
Notice where each five-note scale is located in relation to the chord. It's built on the root or 5th of a minor chord, the 5th of a dominant 7th chord, the b9 of an altered dominant chord, the 5th or 9th of a dominant 7th sus4 chord, the 3rd or 7th of a half-diminished chord, and the 3rd or 6th of a major 7th chord. The next example shows the five-note minor scales transposed to apply to C chords of various types. The chord tone on which the scale is built is shown under the first note.



Be sure to play each application of the five-note scales. Play the chord on a keyboard and, if you're not a pianist, hold the sustain pedal down and play the related five-note scale over it on your instrument. I think you will agree that the scale sounds equally good in all locations.

From the previous example, it should be obvious that it will be very helpful if you are comfortable playing five-note minor scales in all keys! This should be part of your daily practice.

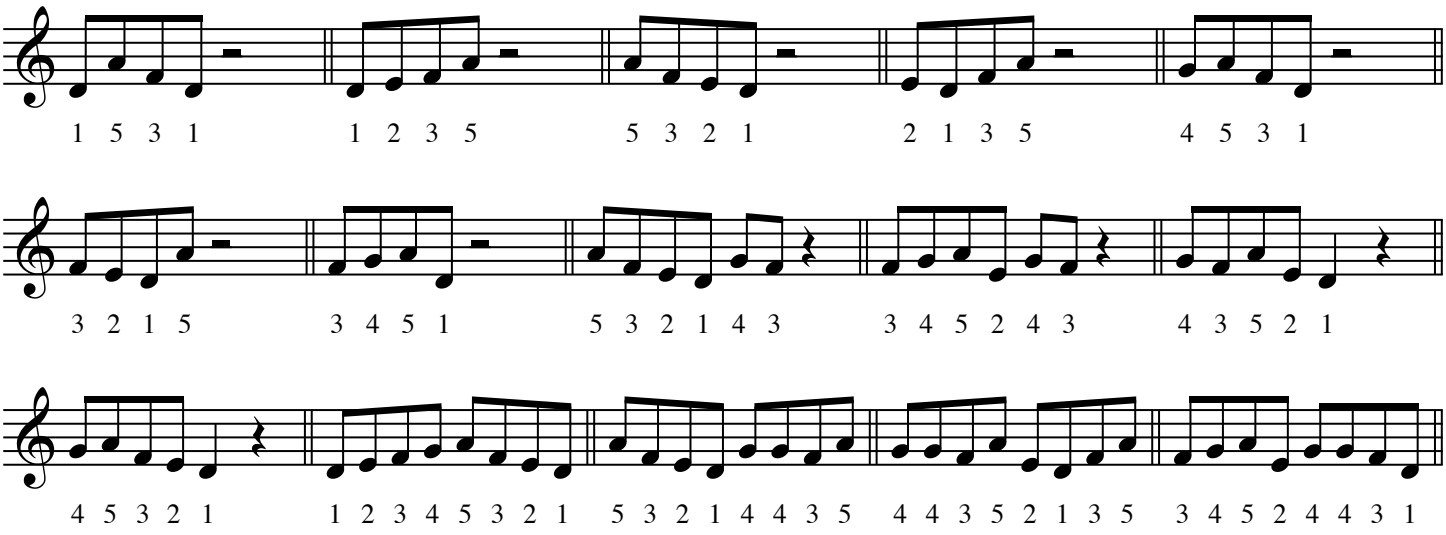
The five-note minor scale in all 12 keys:



2. Motive Development

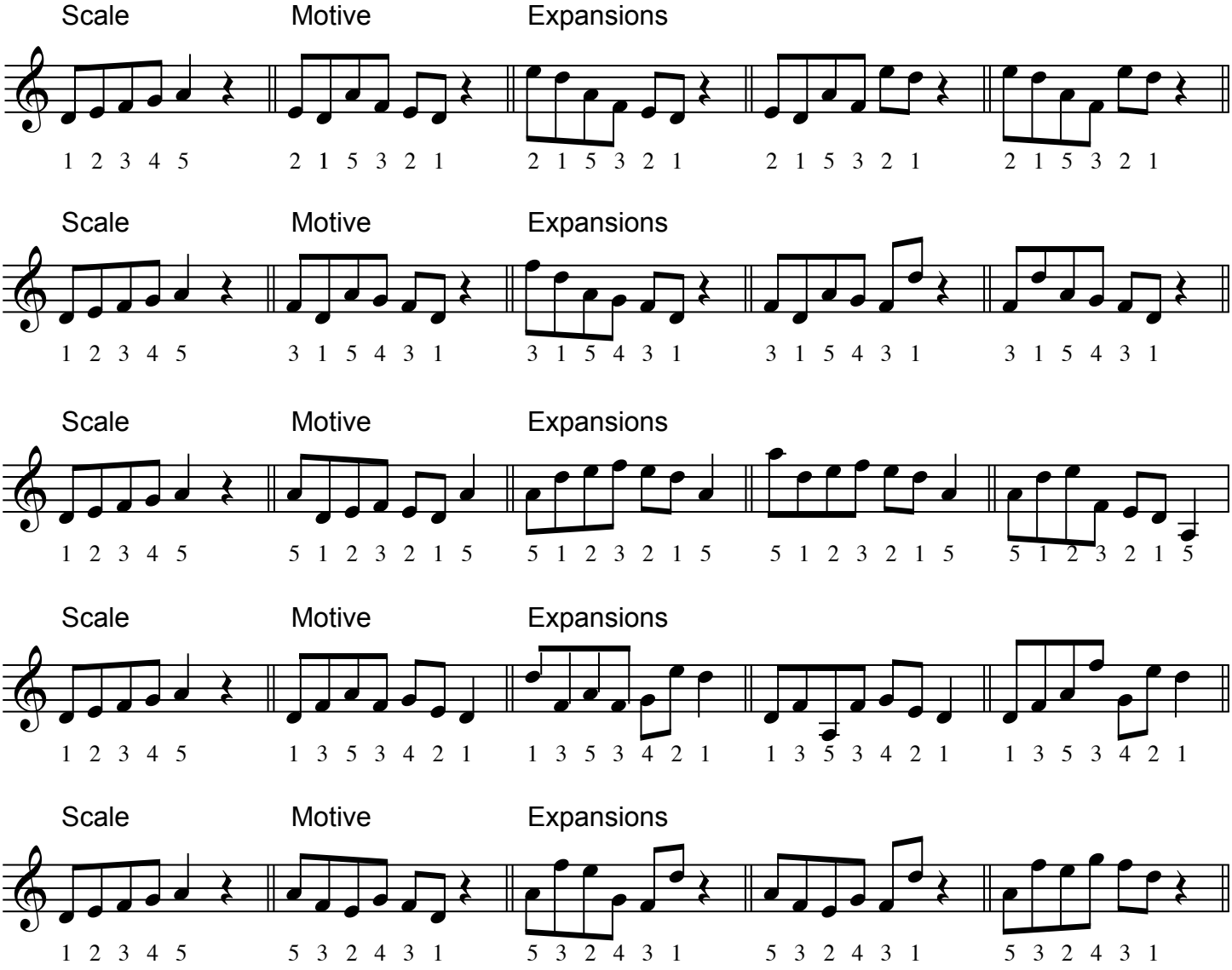
To develop motives, experiment with different types of motion through either the five-note scale or the minor triad it outlines. The examples below begin very simply and gradually become more complex. Start with motives that use only the five notes in the scale. Chromatic embellishment of motives will be discussed later. The scale numbers are written under the notes.

Motives built from a five-note D minor scale:



3. Motive Expansion

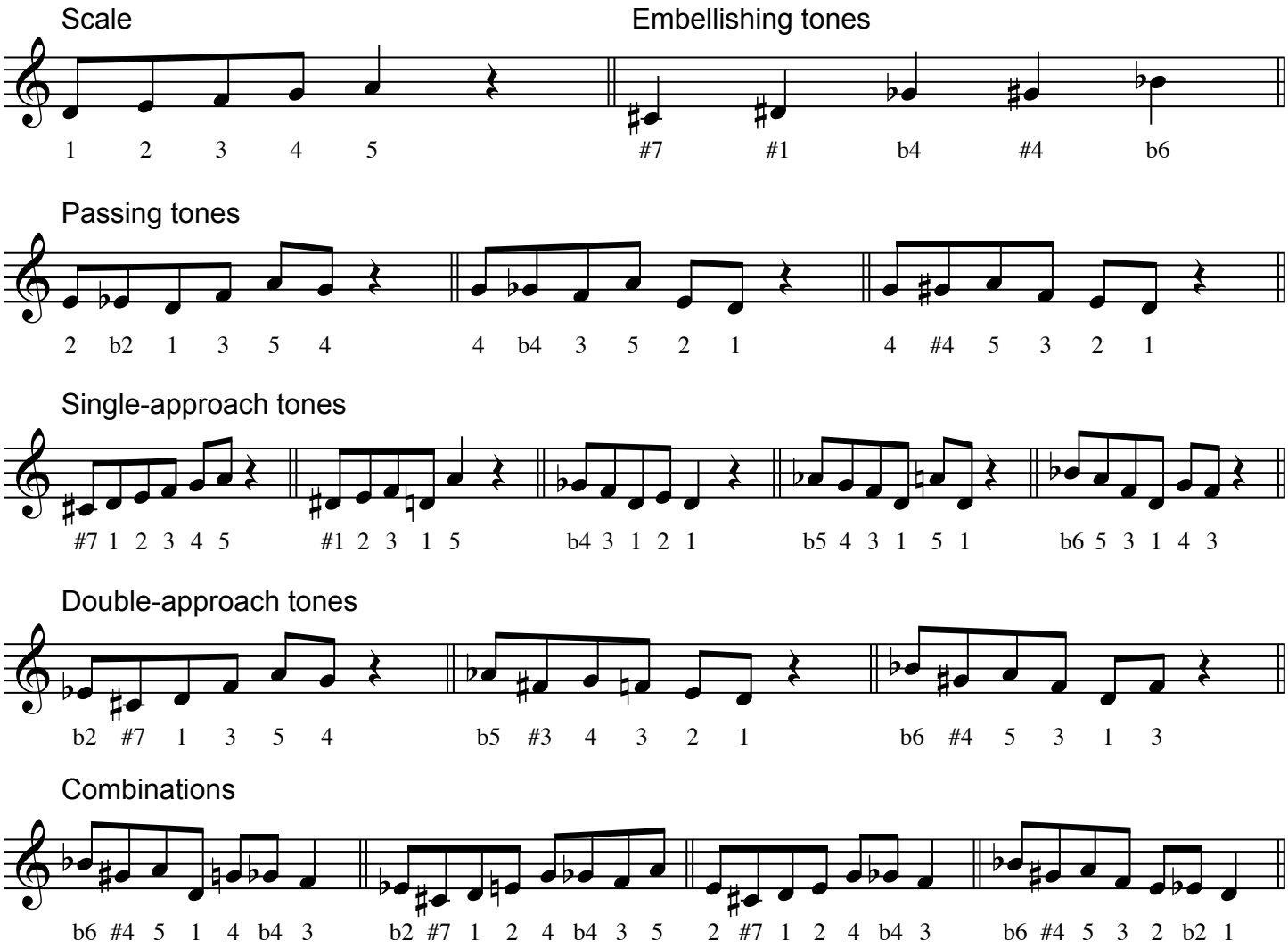
Motives do not have to be confined within the five-note range of the scale. In fact, a very well-known motive, the "Cry Me a River" lick, comes from a five-note minor scale. In the first example below, you will see the original motive and its expansion with the first two notes up an octave. Also shown are a couple of other variations on expanding the motive.



4. Chromatic Embellishment

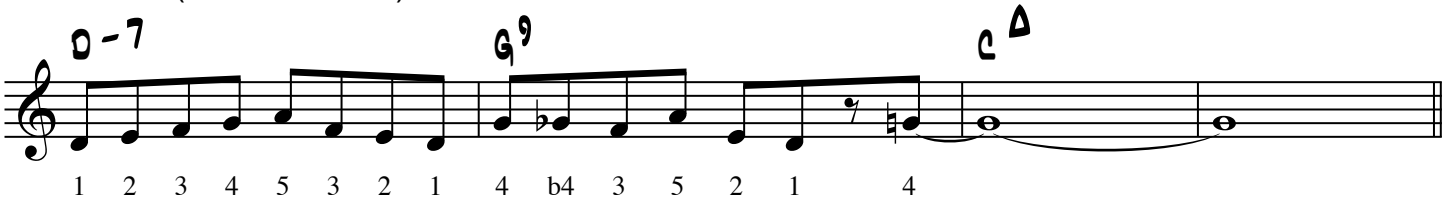
In addition to the five notes in the scale, there are five chromatic notes inside and around the scale. All of these notes are available for embellishing and adding chromatic interest to motives. Potentially, you could use 10 of the 12 notes in a motive, but don't destroy the clarity of the minor scale! As much as we like it, chromaticism destroys tonality if the emphasis isn't on the non-chromatic notes.

A five-note minor scale and its embellishing tones:

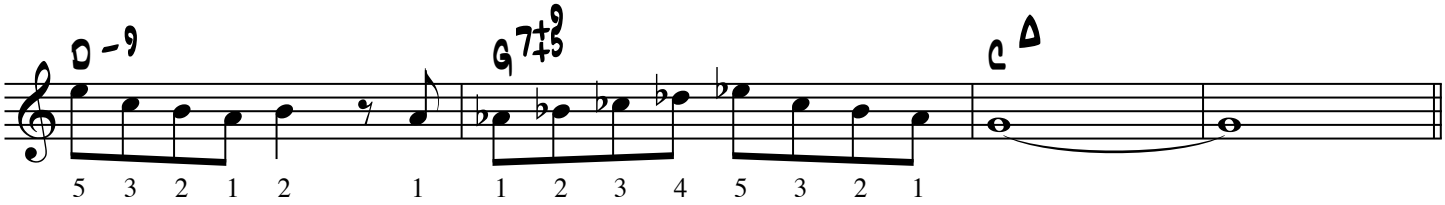


5. Motives Applied to Chord Progressions

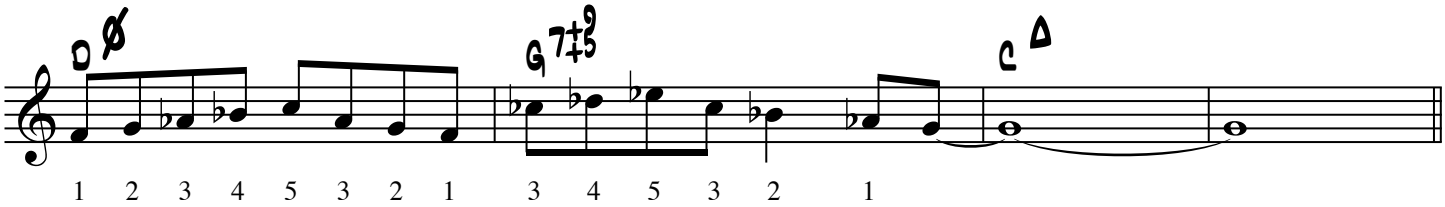
The first phrase uses the same five-note D minor scale for both the II chord (built on the root) and the V chord (built on the 5th).



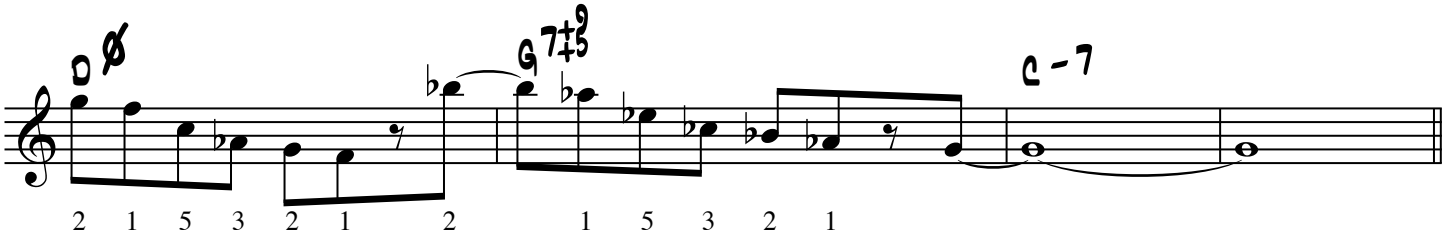
This phrase uses a five-note A minor scale for the II chord (built on the 5th) and a five-note Ab minor scale for the V chord (built on the b9th). This allows for a descending chromatic motion.



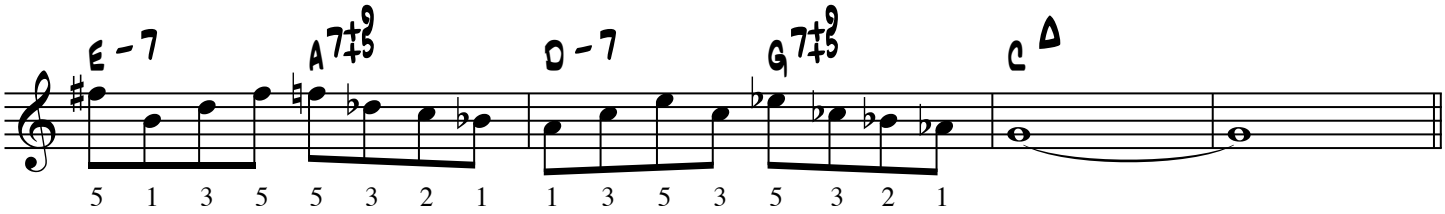
The next phrase uses a five-note F minor scale for the II chord (built on the 3rd) and a five-note Ab minor scale for the V chord (built on the b9th). This creates an ascending motion of a 3rd.



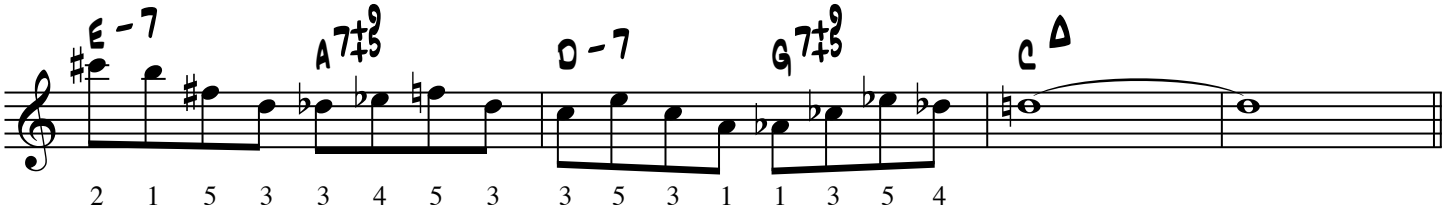
This phrase uses a five-note F minor scale for the II chord and a five-note Ab minor scale for the V chord, as in the previous example. This time the 2-1-5-3-2-1 motives have been expanded to create the "Cry Me a River" lick.



The next phrase is a III-VI-II-V-I (turnaround) progression. It uses minor scales built on the 5th of the minor chords and minor scales built on the b9 of the altered dominant chords. There are opportunities for a large variety of chromatic sequences. Notice that the same 5-3-2-1 motive is used on both of the dominant chords.

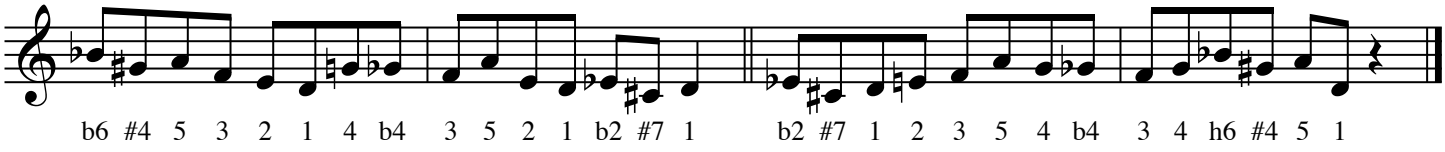


This is another turnaround progression with a different motive used on each chord.



6. Practice Patterns for Motive Embellishment

Here are a couple of practice patterns using all of the notes of a five-note D minor scale and all five embellishing tones. Though they are extremely chromatic, the D minor sound is still clear. Learning these in all keys will increase your security with both the scales and the chromatic embellishment of them.

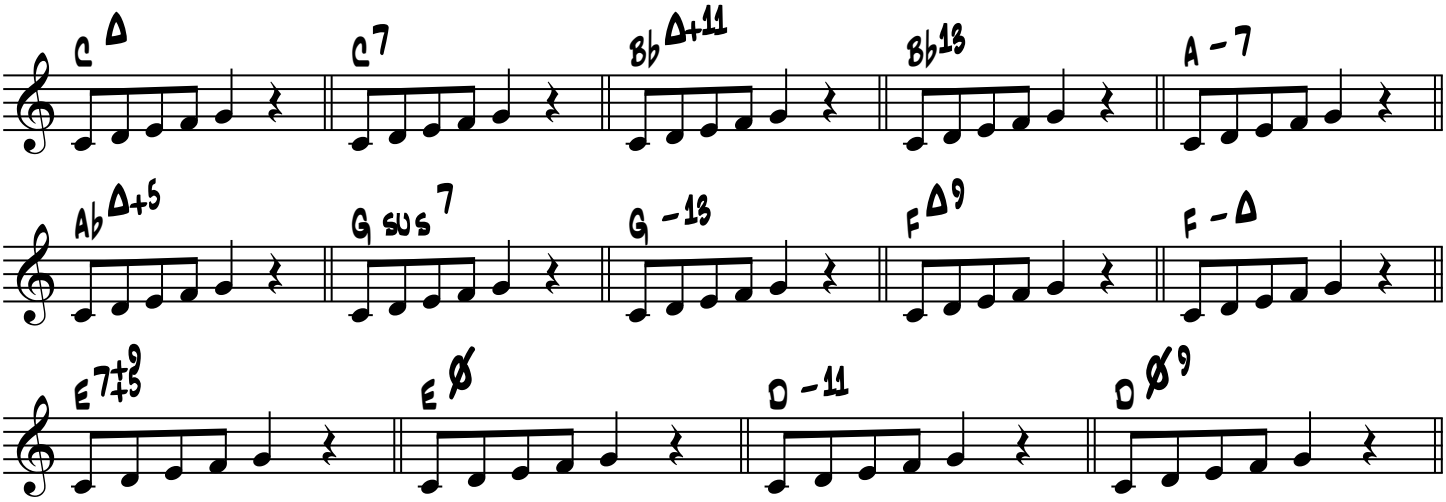


Magic Motives

Part 2
Five-Note Major Scales

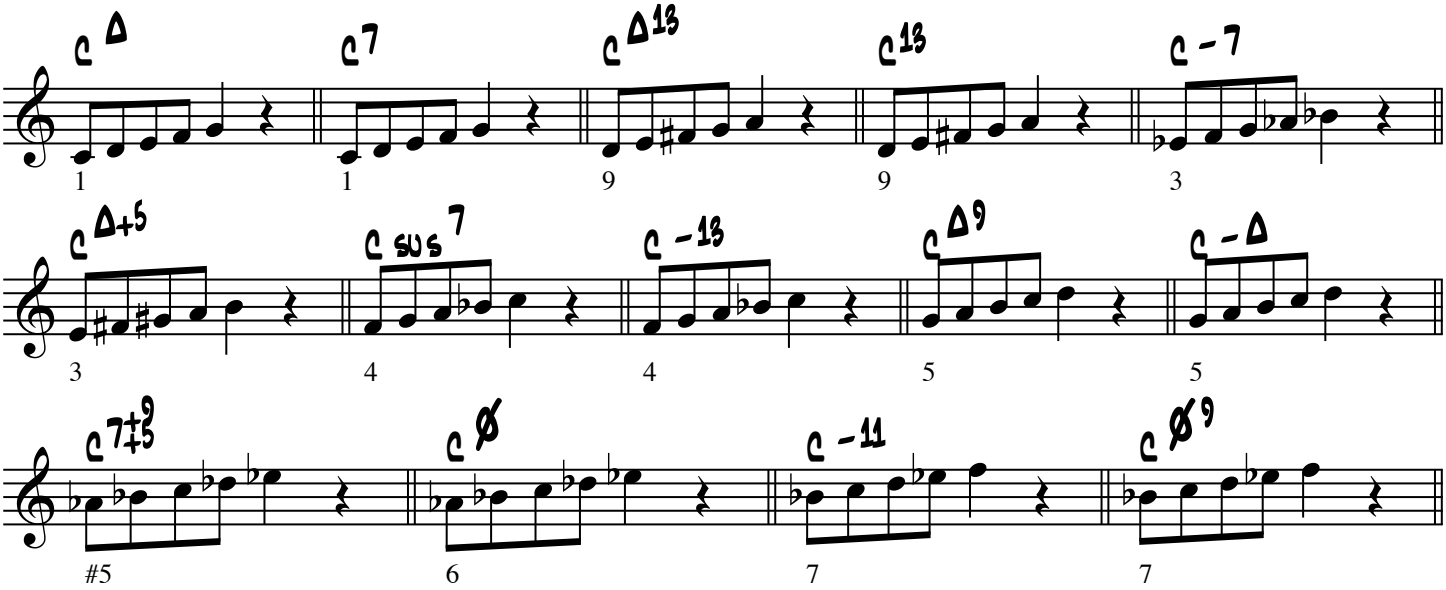
1. Applications

Here is a five-note C major scale shown with chord symbols indicating all of its applications.
Note its structure: whole-step, whole-step, half-step, whole-step.



Notice where each five-note scale is located in relation to the chord. It is built on the root, or 9th, of a major 7th or dominant 7th chord; the 3rd of a minor 7th chord, or major 7th #5 chord; the 4th of a dominant 7th sus4, or minor 7th chord; the 5th of a major 7th, or minor #7 chord; the #5 of an altered dominant 7th; the 6th of a half-diminished chord; and the 7th of a minor 7th, or half-diminished 7th.

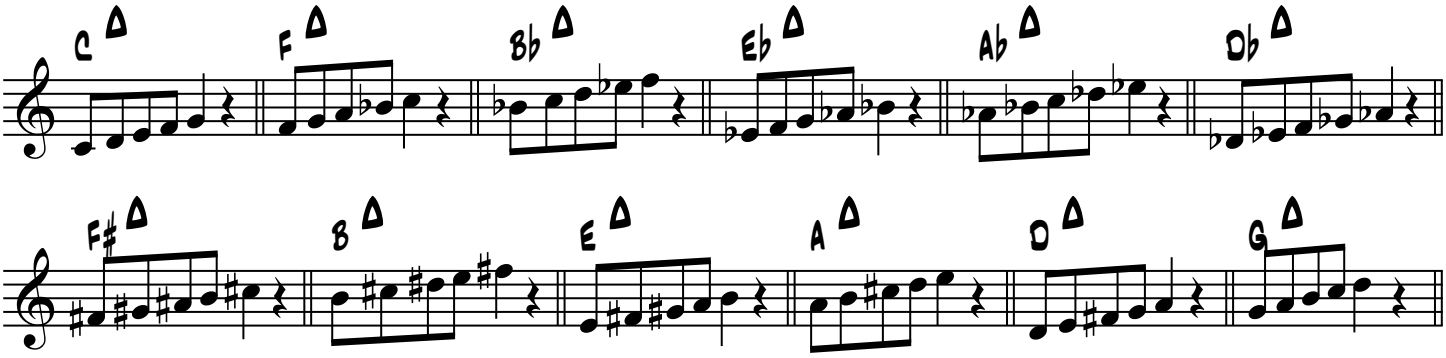
The next example shows the five-note major scales transposed to apply to C chords of various types.
The chord tone on which the scale is built is shown under the first note.



Be sure to play each application of the five-note scales. Play the chord on a keyboard and, if you're not a pianist, hold the sustain pedal down and play the related five-note scale over it on your instrument. I think you will agree that the scale sounds equally good in all locations.

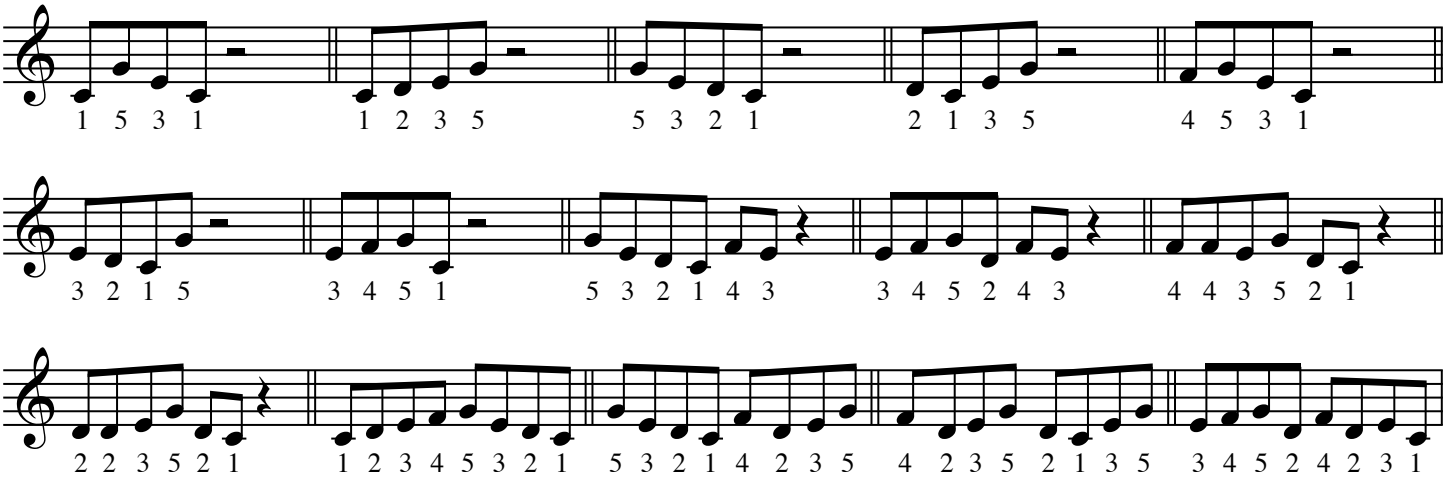
From the previous example, it should be obvious that it will be very helpful if you are comfortable playing five-note major scales in all keys. This should be part of your daily practice.

The five-note major scale in all 12 keys:



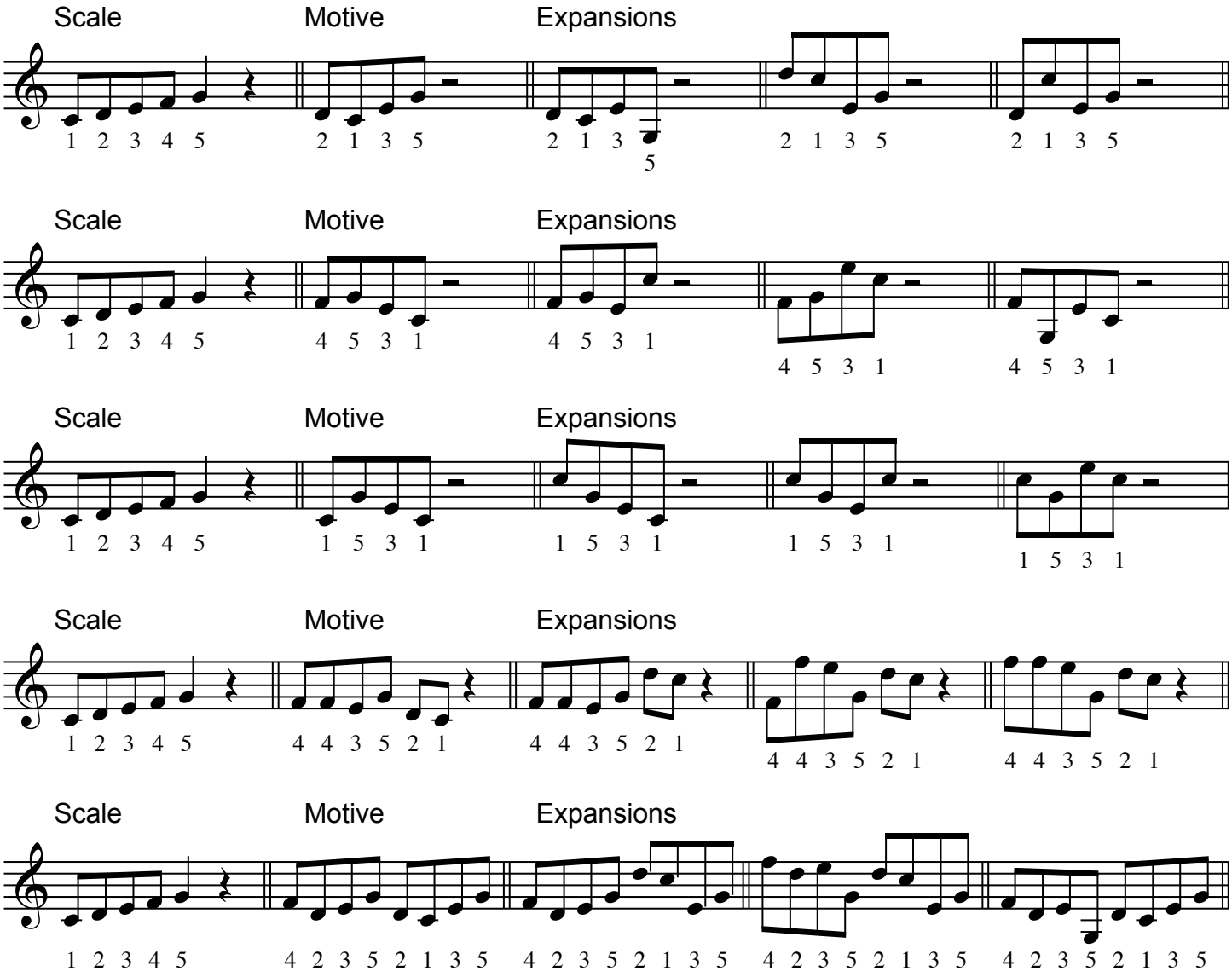
2. Motive Development

To develop motives, experiment with different types of motion through either the five-note scale or the major triad it outlines. Below, you will see some examples that begin very simply and gradually become more complex. Begin with motives that use only the five notes in the scale. Chromatic embellishment of motives will be discussed later. Motives from a five-note C major scale:



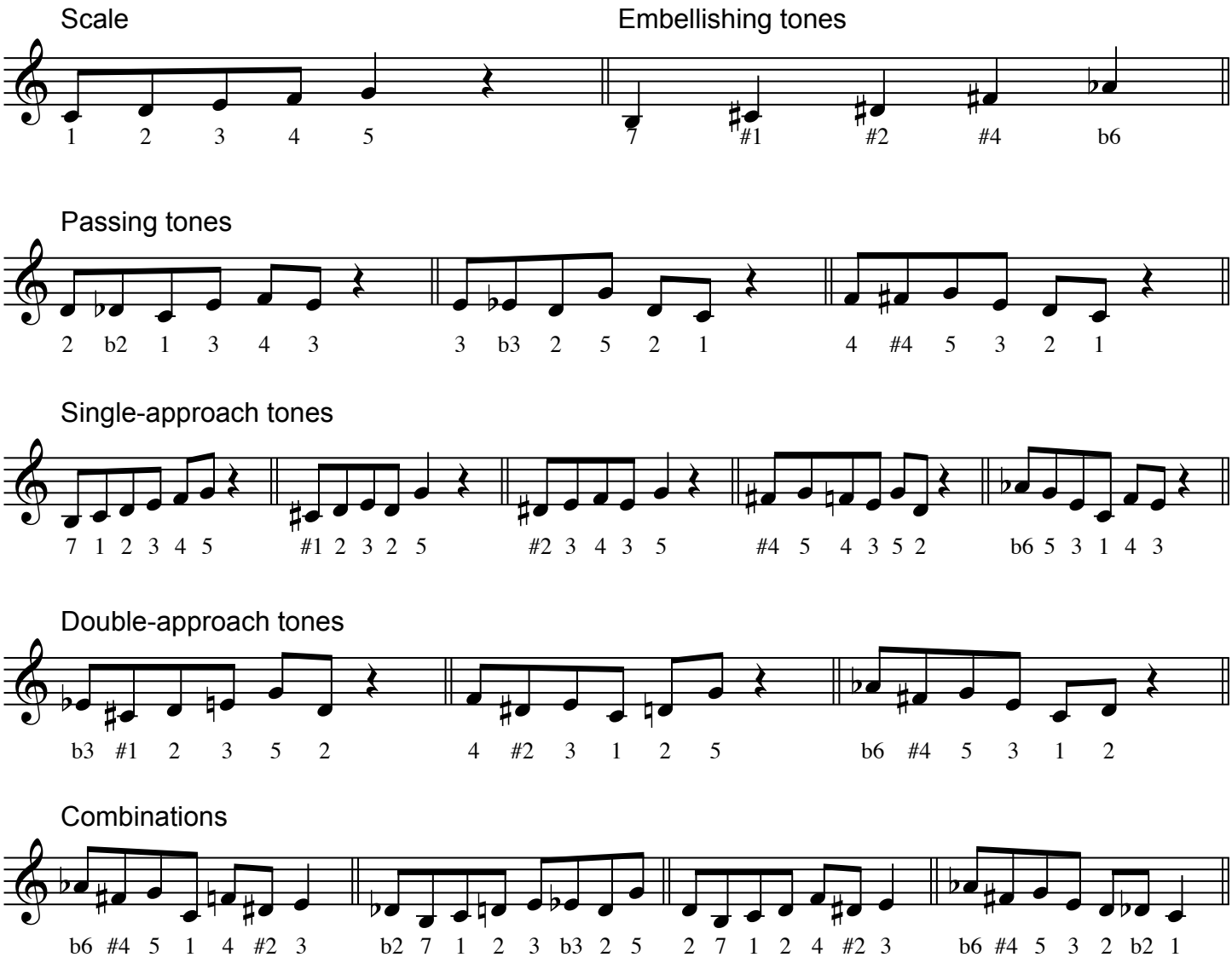
3. Motive Expansion

Motives do not have to be confined to the five-note range of the scale. Any notes in the motive may be moved up or down an octave to create larger intervals. Here are some five-note major scale motives with their expansions. The scale numbers are written under the notes.



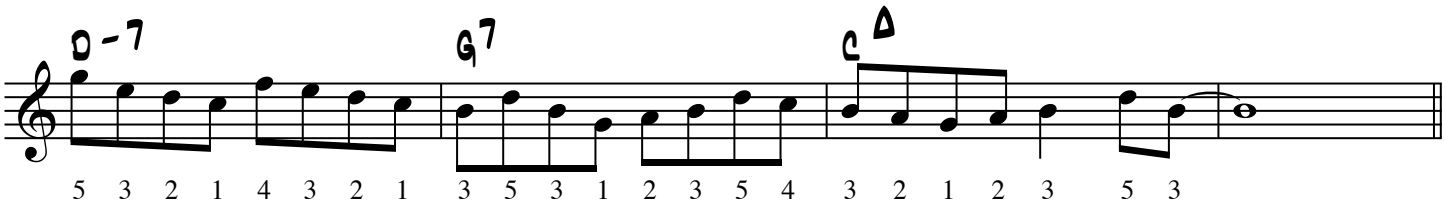
4. Chromatic Embellishment

In addition to the five notes in the scale, there are five chromatic notes inside and around the scale. All of these notes are available for embellishing and adding chromatic interest to motives. Potentially, you could use 10 of the 12 notes in a motive, but don't destroy the clarity of the major scale! As much as we like it, chromaticism destroys tonality if the emphasis isn't on the non-chromatic notes. The next example shows a five-note major scale and its embellishing tones.

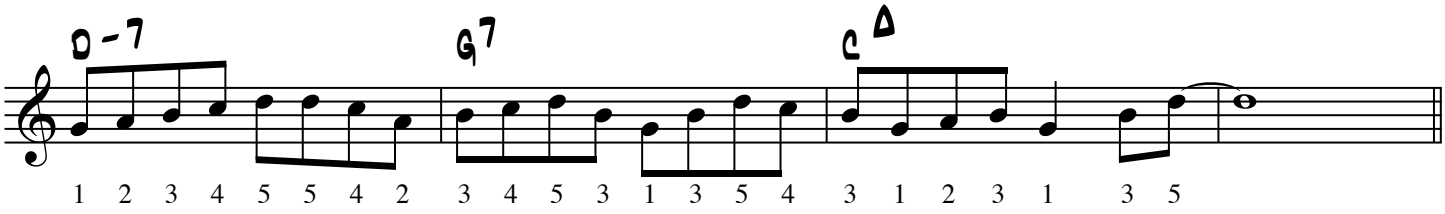


5. Motives Applied to Chord Progressions

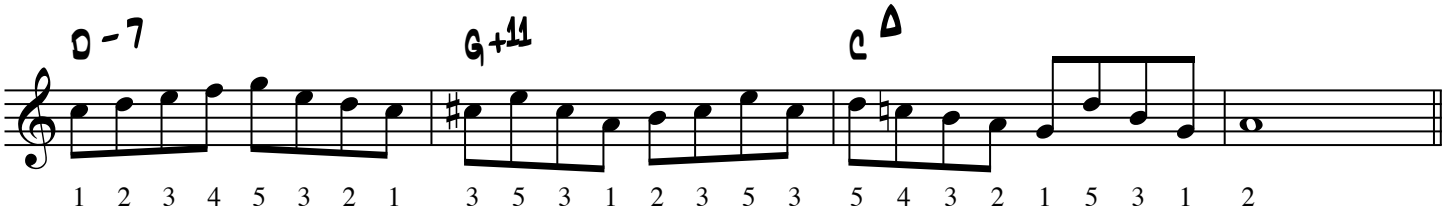
The first phrase uses a five-note C major scale for the II chord (built on the 7th), and the same five-note G major scale for both the V chord (built on the root) and the I chord (built on the 5th).



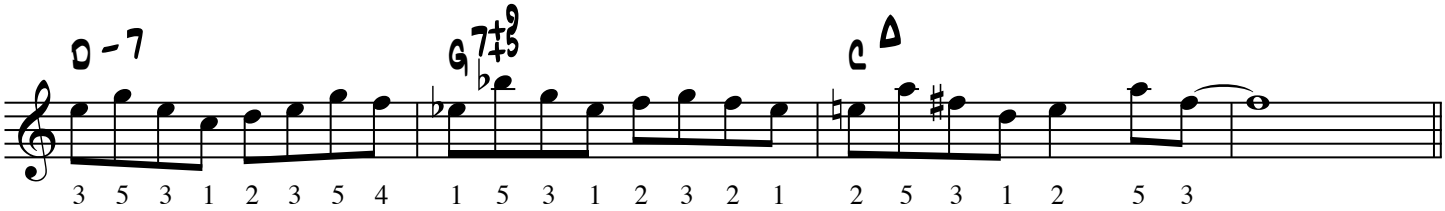
This phrase uses a five-note G major scale for all three chords of the II-V-I progression.



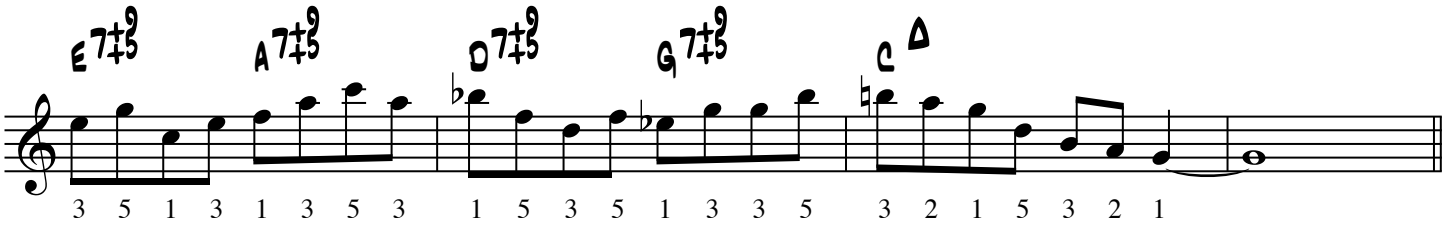
The next phrase uses a five-note C major scale for the II chord (built on the 7th), a five-note A major scale for the V chord (built on the 9th) and a five-note G major scale for the I chord (built on the 5th).



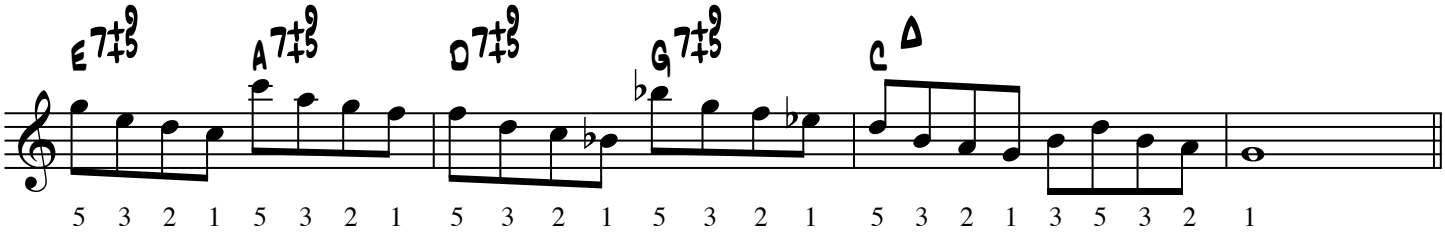
This phrase uses a five-note C major scale for the II chord, a five-note Eb major scale for the V chord and a five-note D major scale for the I chord.



The next phrase is a III-VI-II-V-I (turnaround) progression. It uses five-note major scales built on the #5th of the altered dominant chords and a five-note major scale built on the 5th of the I chord.



This is another turnaround progression, using the same scales as the previous example, with the same motive used on each chord.



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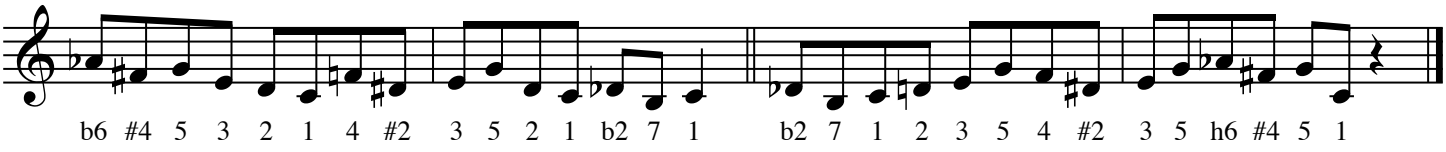
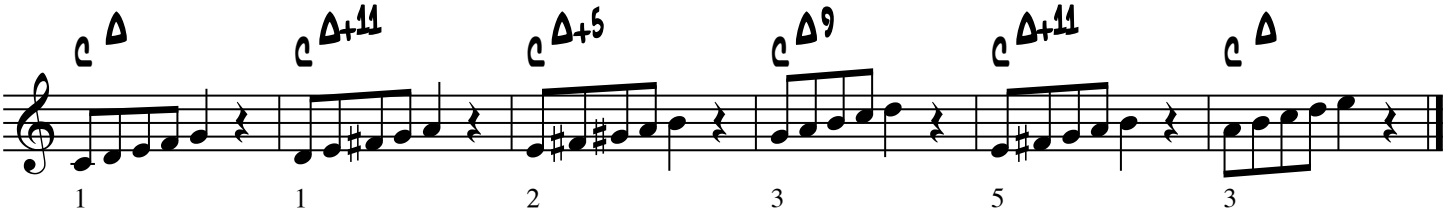


Magic Motives

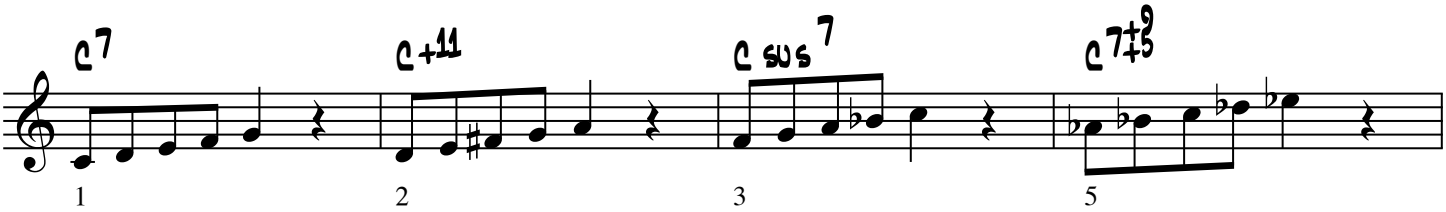
Part 8
Summary of Applications

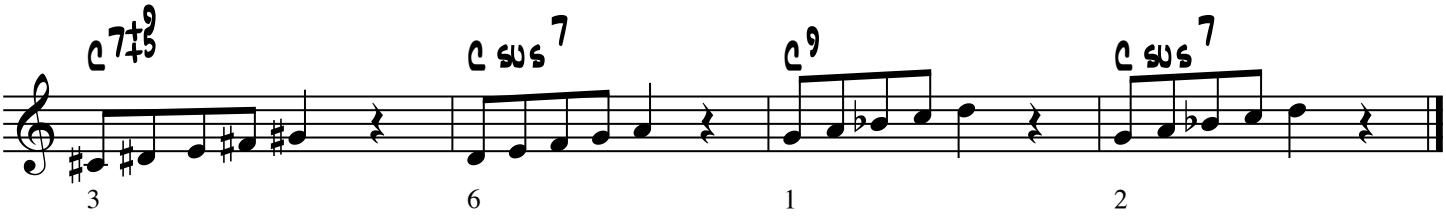
(The chord tones, on which the scales are located,
are under the first notes in each example.)

Major 7th Chords

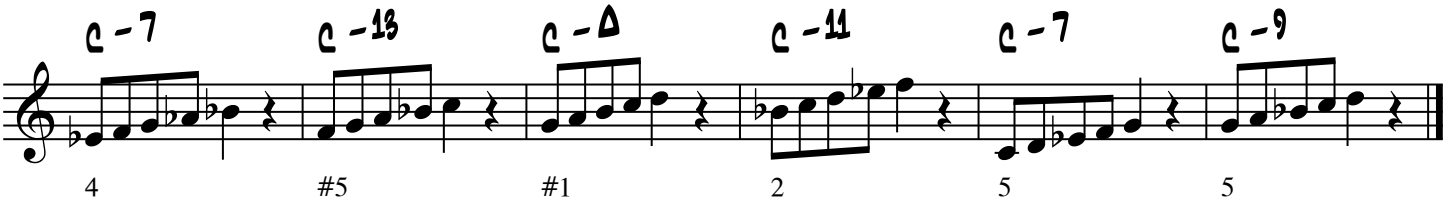


Dominant 7th Chords

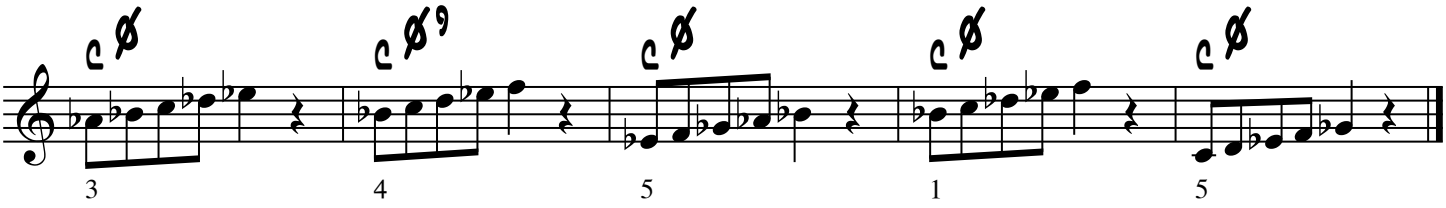




Minor 7th Chords



Half-Diminished Chords



Summary of Applications (continued)

Major 7th Chords:

Five-note major scale on 1, 2 (#11), 3 (#4, #5) and 5
Five-note minor scale on 3 (#11) and 6

Dominant 7th Chords:

Five-note major scale on 1, 2 (#11), 4 (sus4) and #5 (#5, #9)
Five-note minor scale on b2 (#5, #9), 2 (sus4) and 5 (9, 9sus4)
Five-note diminished scale on 3, 5, 7 and b9

Minor 7th Chords:

Five-note major scale on 3, 4, 5 (#7) and 7
Five-note minor scale on 1 and 5

Half-Diminished Chords:

Five-note major scale on 6 and 7
Five-note minor scale on 3 and 7
Five-note diminished scale on 1

Diminished 7th Chords:

Five-note diminished scale on 1, 3, 5 and 7

Magic Motives

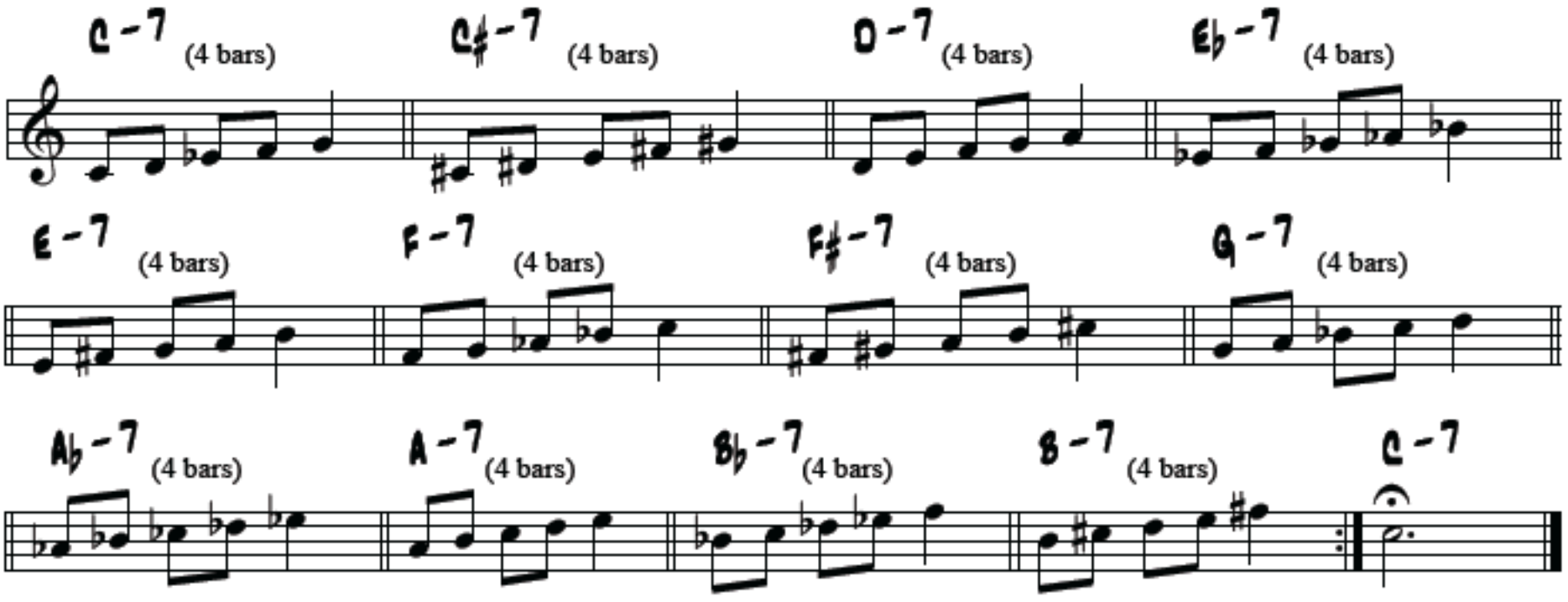
Concert Key Chord Progressions

(All progressions are in 4/4 time.)

MINOR – 4 bars each
Chromatically up (2 times)

Track 1

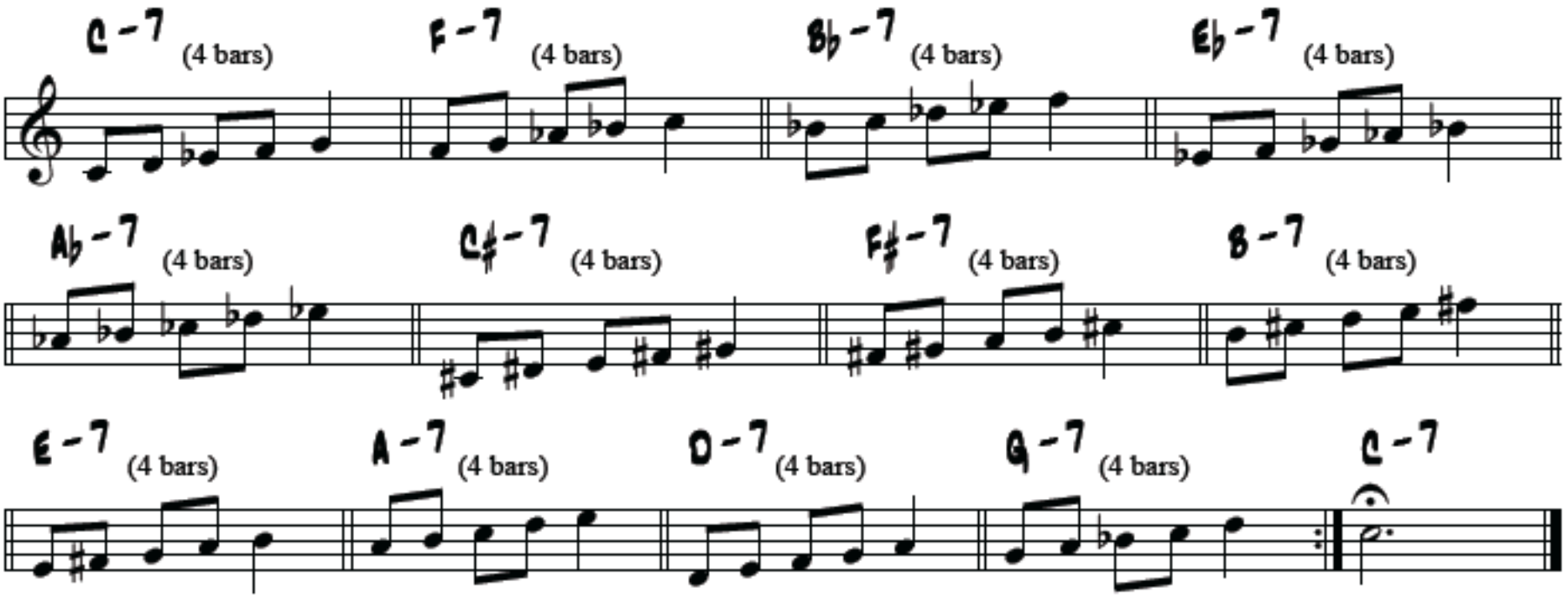
1st time – bossa
2nd time – swing



MINOR – 4 bars each
Through the cycle (2 times)

Track 2

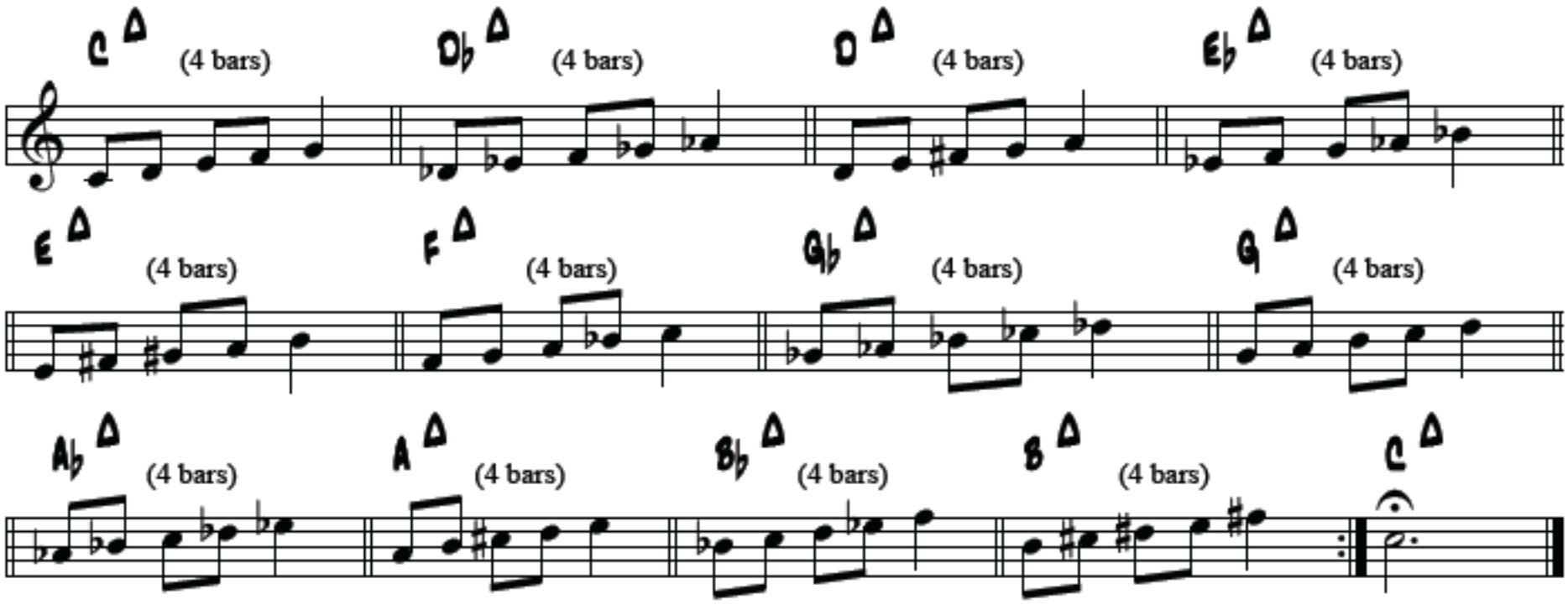
Both times – swing



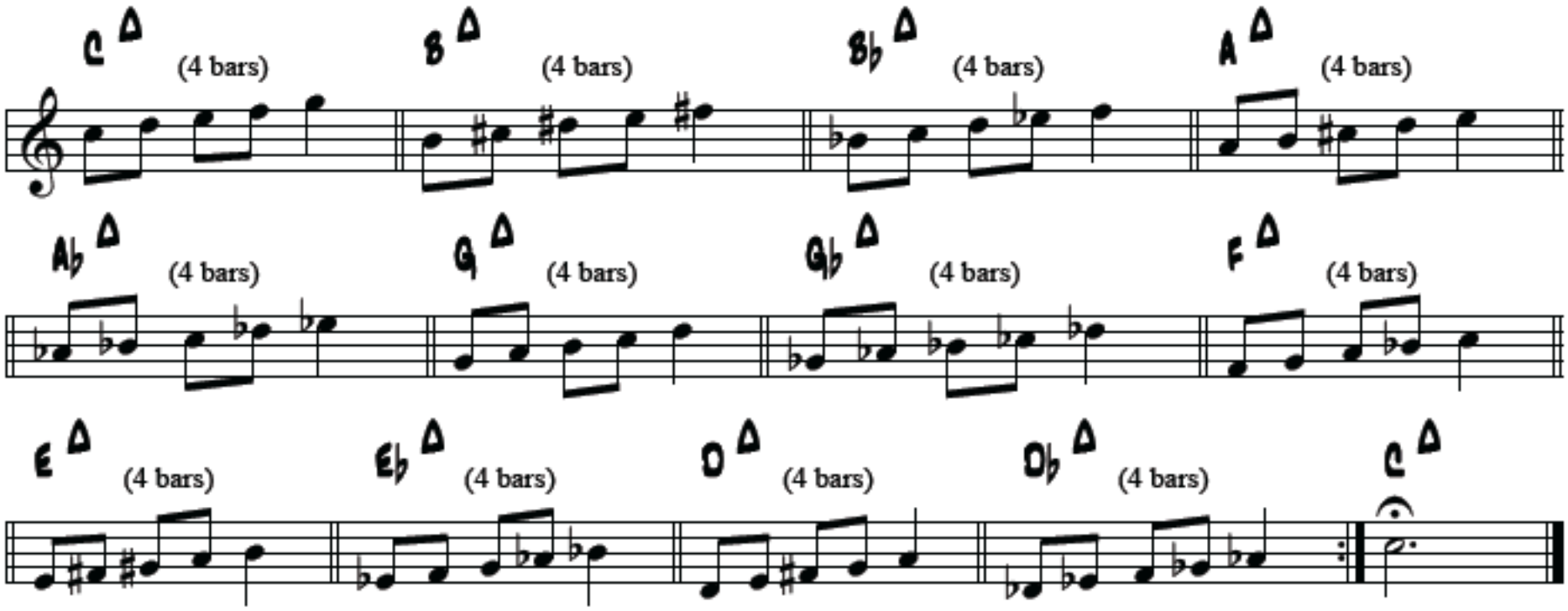
MAJOR – 4 bars each
Chromatically up (2 times)

Track 3

1st time – bossa
2nd time – swing



MAJOR – 4 bars each
Chromatically down (2 times)

Track 4

1st time – bossa
2nd time – swing