Understanding a Tune for Improvisation

by

Dan Haerle

Video available through MyMusicMasterclass.com

The five main factors to consider:

1) The melody and its implications

2) Observe which keys are present

3) Are the chord symbols specific?

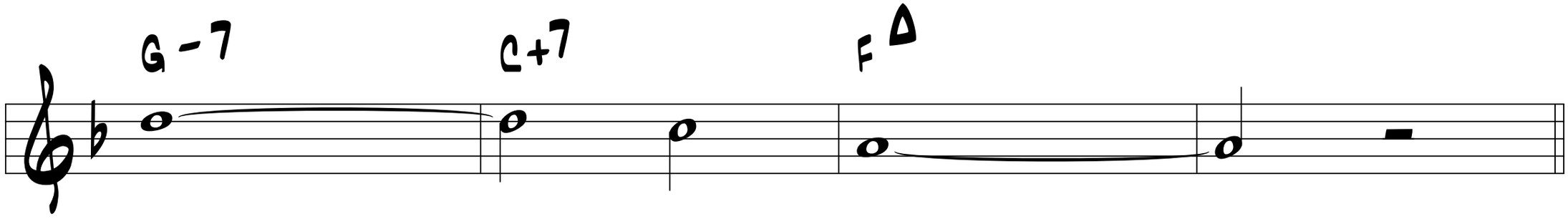
4) What are the functions of chords?

5) Context - preceding & following chords

Once I Loved

Concert part

Antonio Carlos Jobim



In the second measure, the C+7 indicates a raised 5th (G#) but the melody is on D, a natural 9. These two bits of information suggest a C Whole Tone scale which contains both notes.

How Insensitive

Concert part

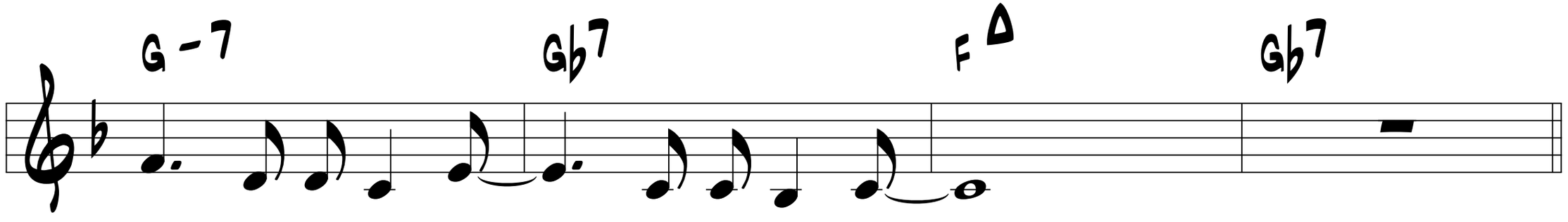
Antonio Carlos Jobim

The Bb in the melody suggests a natural minor scale, a less common choice in the age of Dorian. The D Dorian scale would have a B natural which is definitely a different sound than the melody!

The Girl From Ipanema

Concert part

Antonio Carlos Jobim

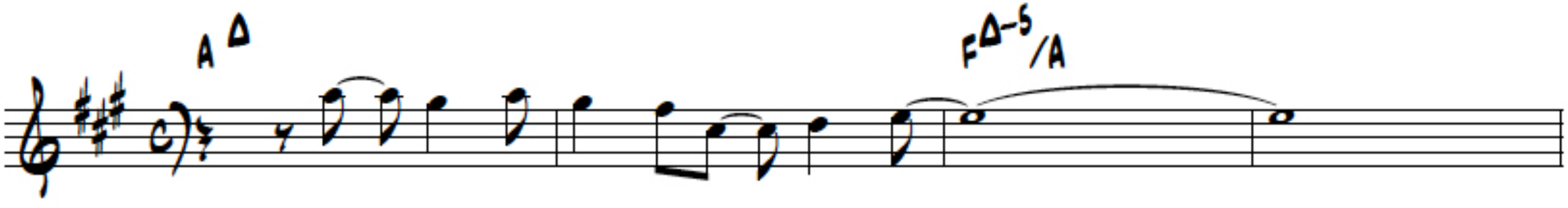


In the second measure, the melody suggests a Lydian, b7 scale because the C natural is a #4 (#11) in the chord. Also, Jobim used a tri-tone sub of Gb7 to replace the normal V chord, C7, so it is natural to hear the root of the original V chord!

Triste

Concert

Antonio Carlos Jobim

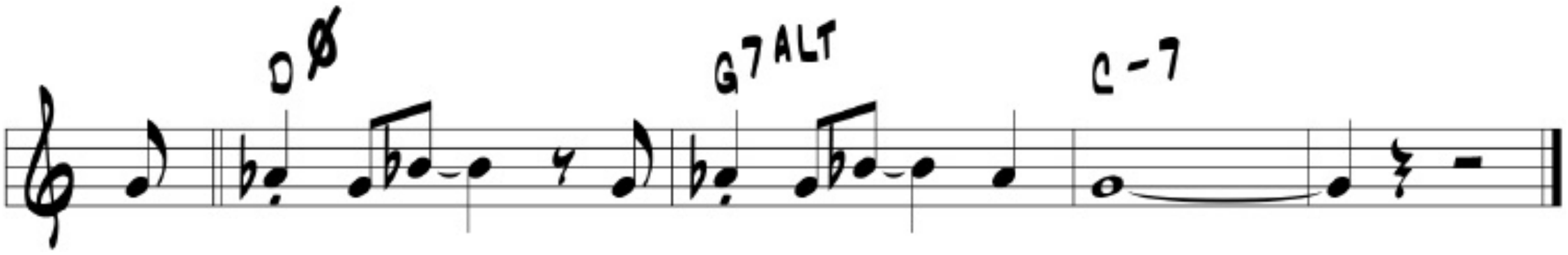


The choice of an Fma7b5 suggests an F Lydian scale. F Lydian is the same as A natural minor. If Jobim had called that chord Ami7, a performer might play A Dorian. Jobim sent the message that he didn’t want a Dorian sound!

The Melody

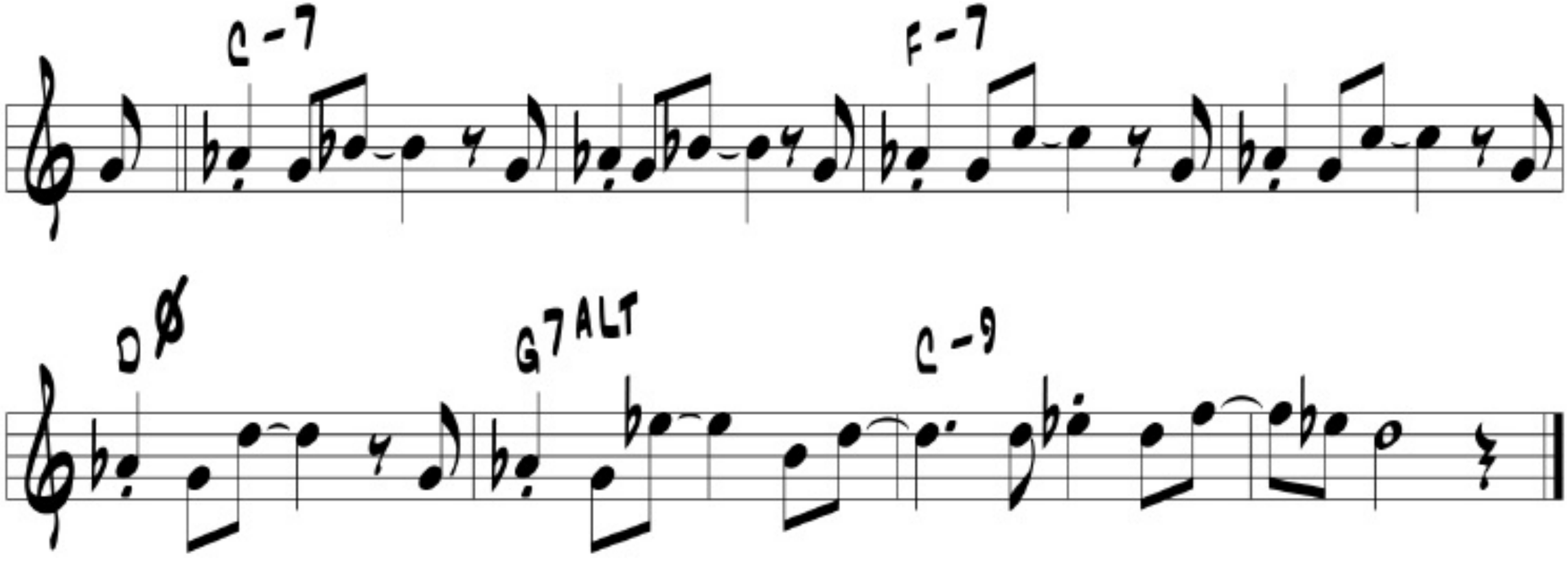
1) Show respect for the composer
2) Material for improvisation
3) Development of melodic fragments

The last four measures of Blue Bossa:



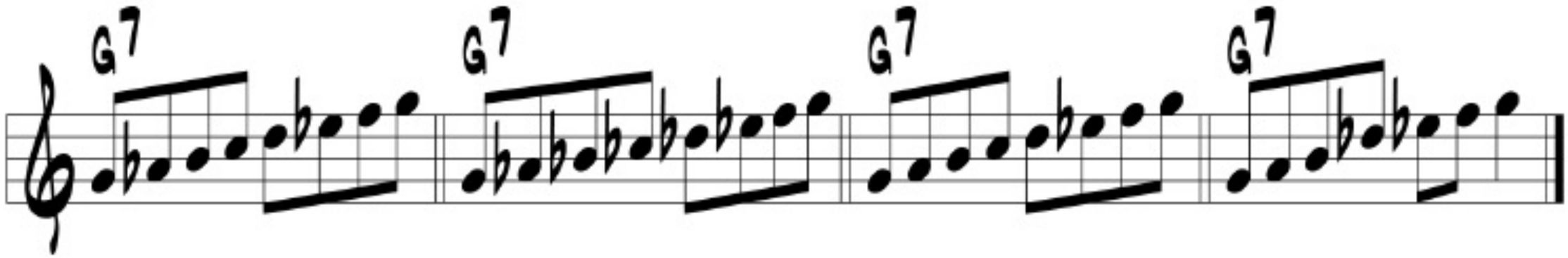
Solo sample using melodic material:

(The first eight measures of Blue Bossa,
melodic fragment from the last four bars)



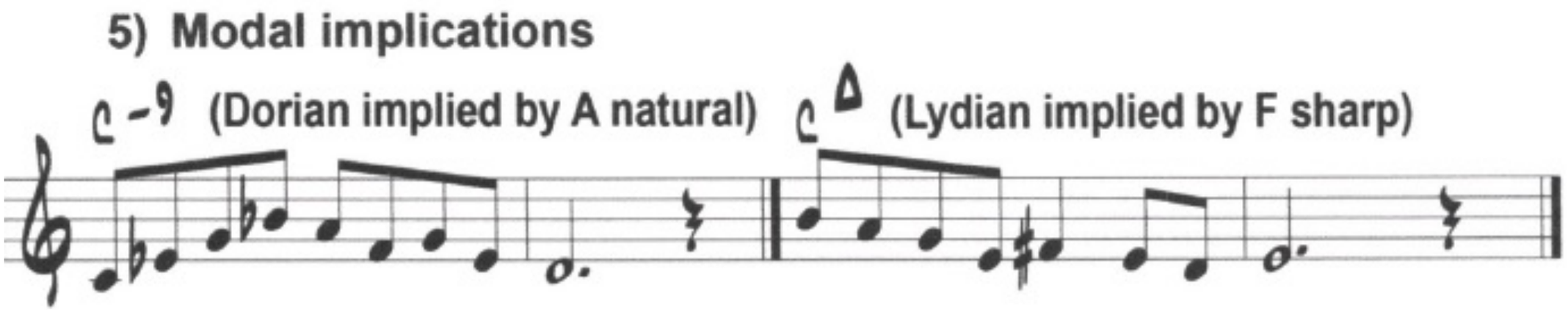
**When the chord symbol is not specific,
a melody note may narrow down the choices.**

If the chord is G7 and there is an Eb in the melody, that implies a #5 or b13 and the chosen scale should reinforce that. Several options are shown below:

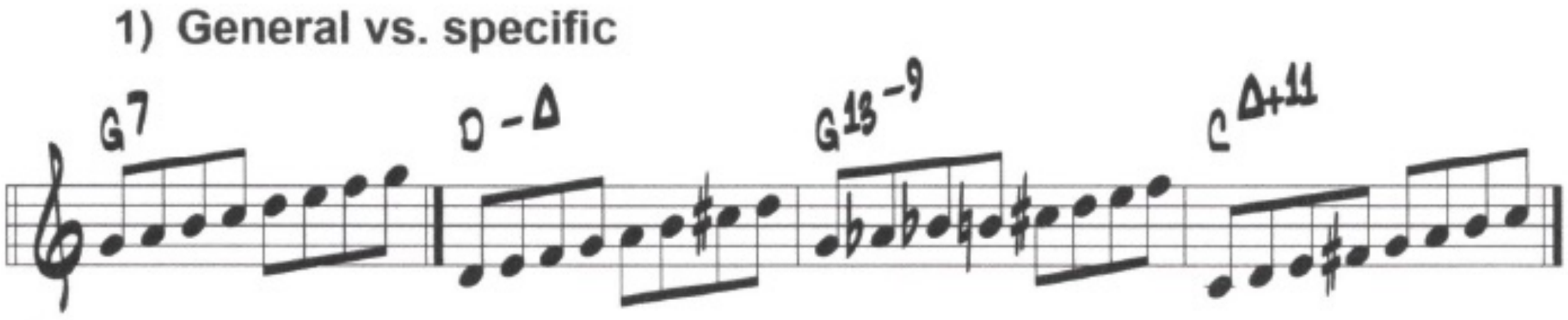


C Harm. minor **G Dim W T** **G Mix, b6** **G Whole Tone**

Sometimes the melody may include a note that implies a specific mode!



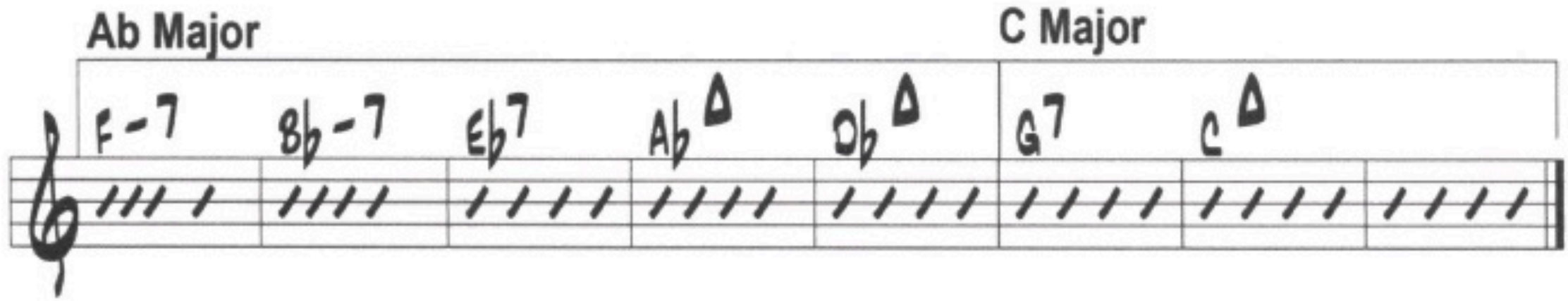
Chord Symbols



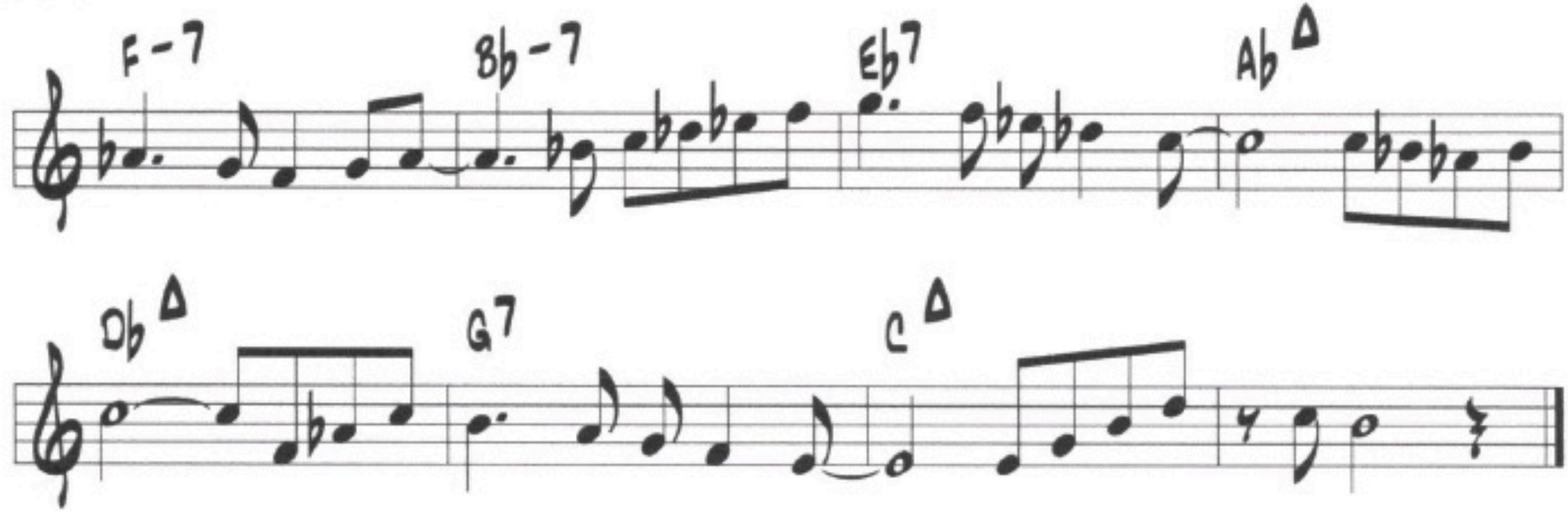
G7 - general, any dominant 7th scale except blues
Dmi#7 - requires either harmonic or melodic minor
G13b9 - the 1/2-W diminished scale includes both
Cma7#11 - requires a Lydian scale

Keys:

1) Bracketing key areas



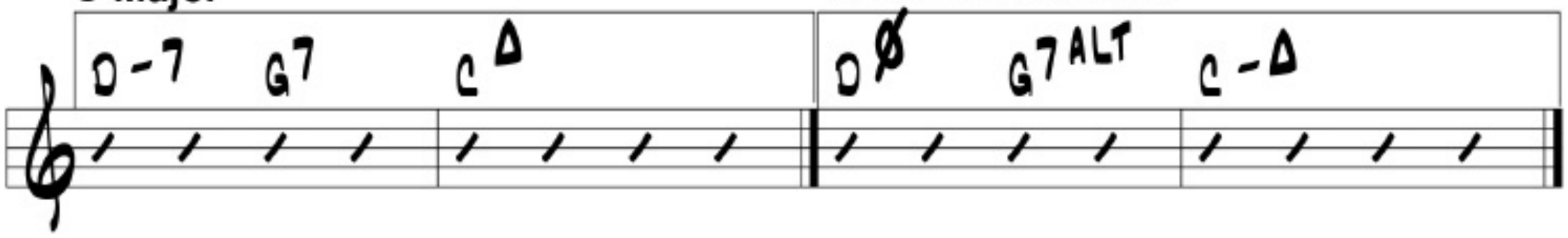
Solo:



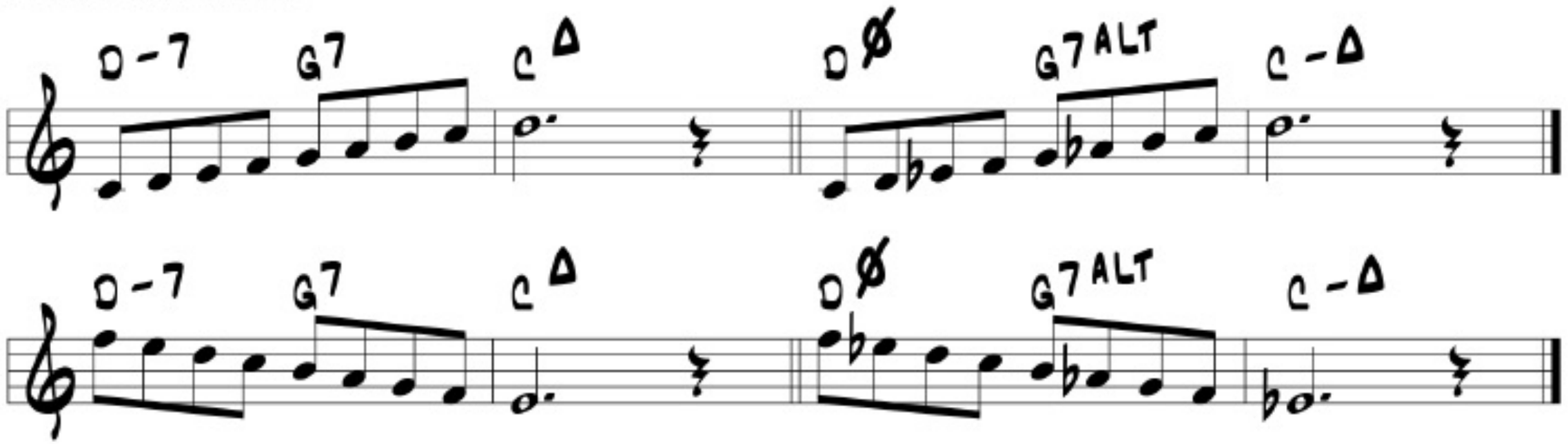
2) Bracketing the II - V - I progression

C Major

C Harmonic Minor

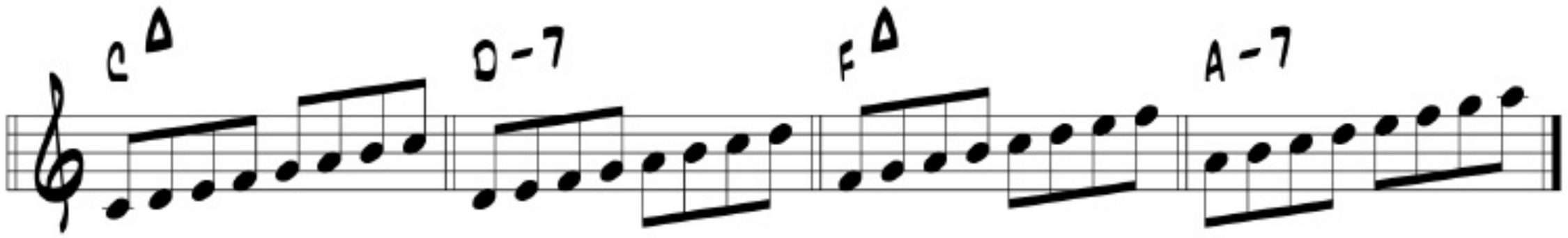


Scale Motion:



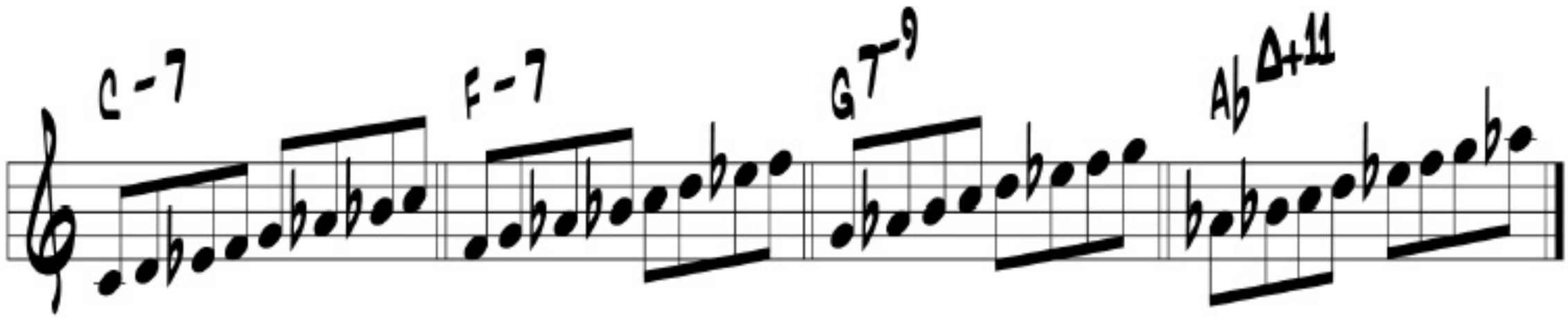
Chord Function

1) Color choices I, II, IV, VI in C major



Major **Dorian** **Lydian** **Aeolian**

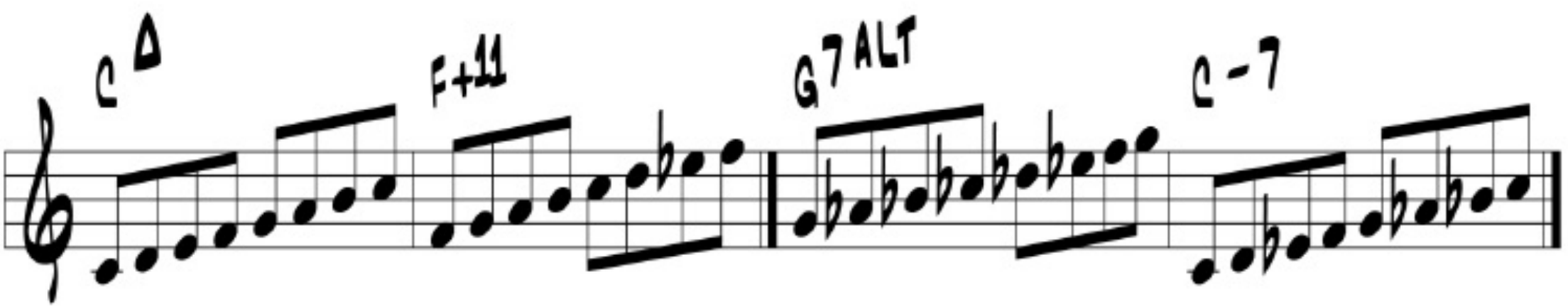
2) Color choices I, IV, V, VI in C minor



Aeolian **Dorian** **5th mode H. M.** **Lydian**

Context

1) I – IV7 in major, V7 - I in minor



Major **Lydian, b7** **Diminished W. T.** **Aeolian**

Since we just heard a B natural in the Cma7 chord, we want to hear it continue in the F#11.

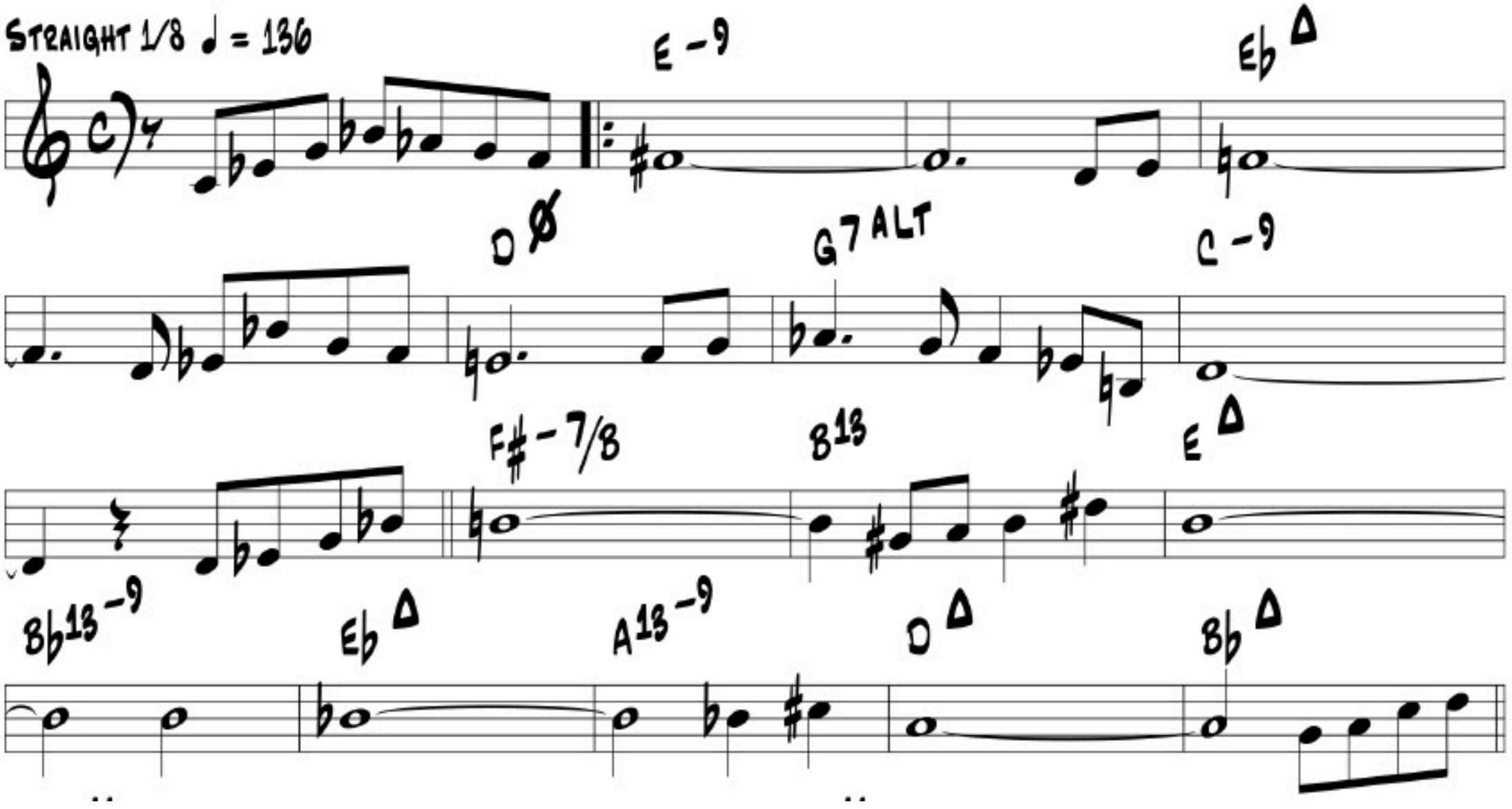
The altered scale on G7 prepares the sound of the Cmi7 by supplying all the notes of the key!

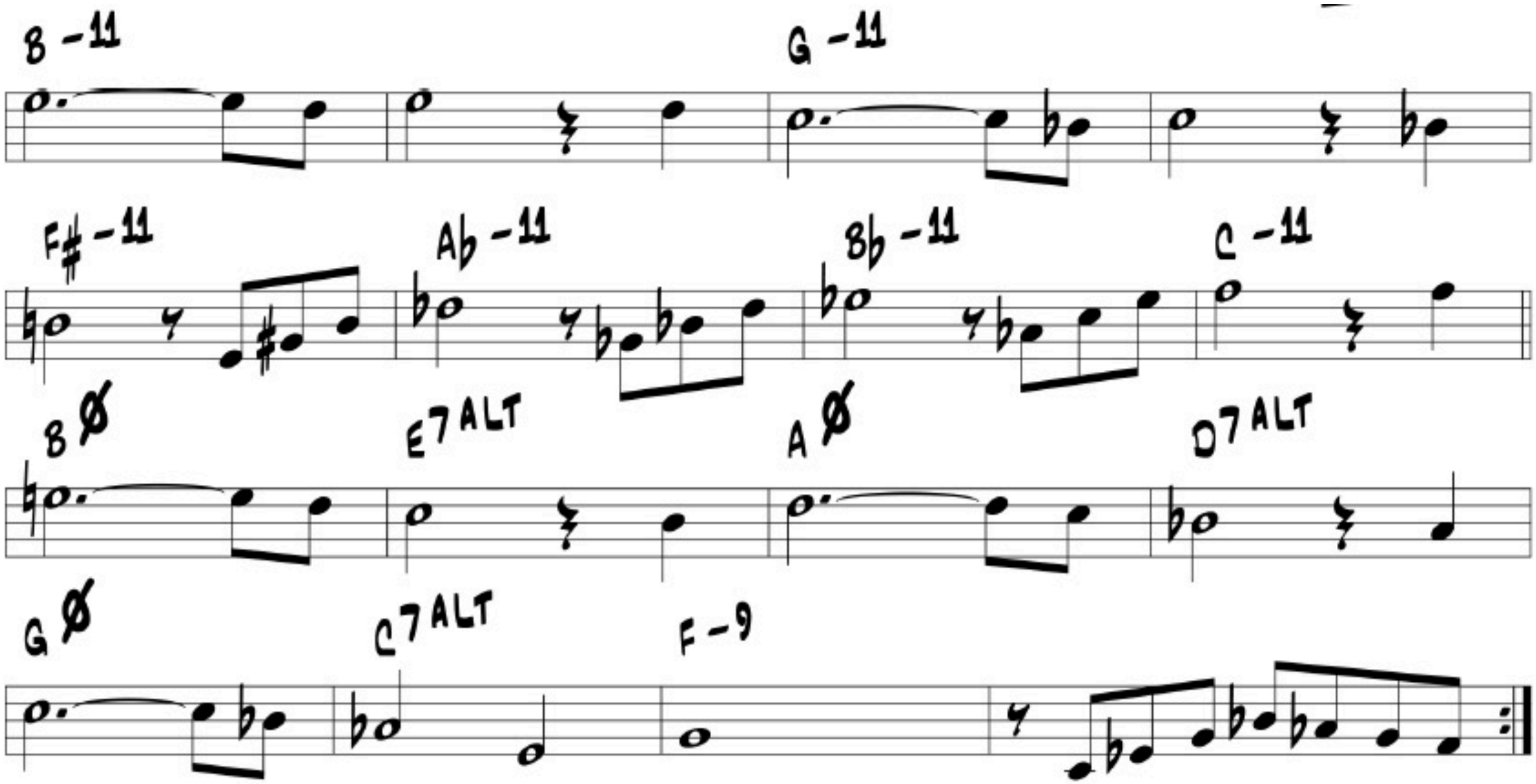
Luminescence

Pickups set tempo

Dan Haerle

Straight 1/8 ♩ = 136




B -11
G -11
F# -11
Ab -11
Bb -11
C -11
B Ø
E7 ALT
A Ø
D7 ALT
G Ø
C7 ALT
F -9

Luminescence

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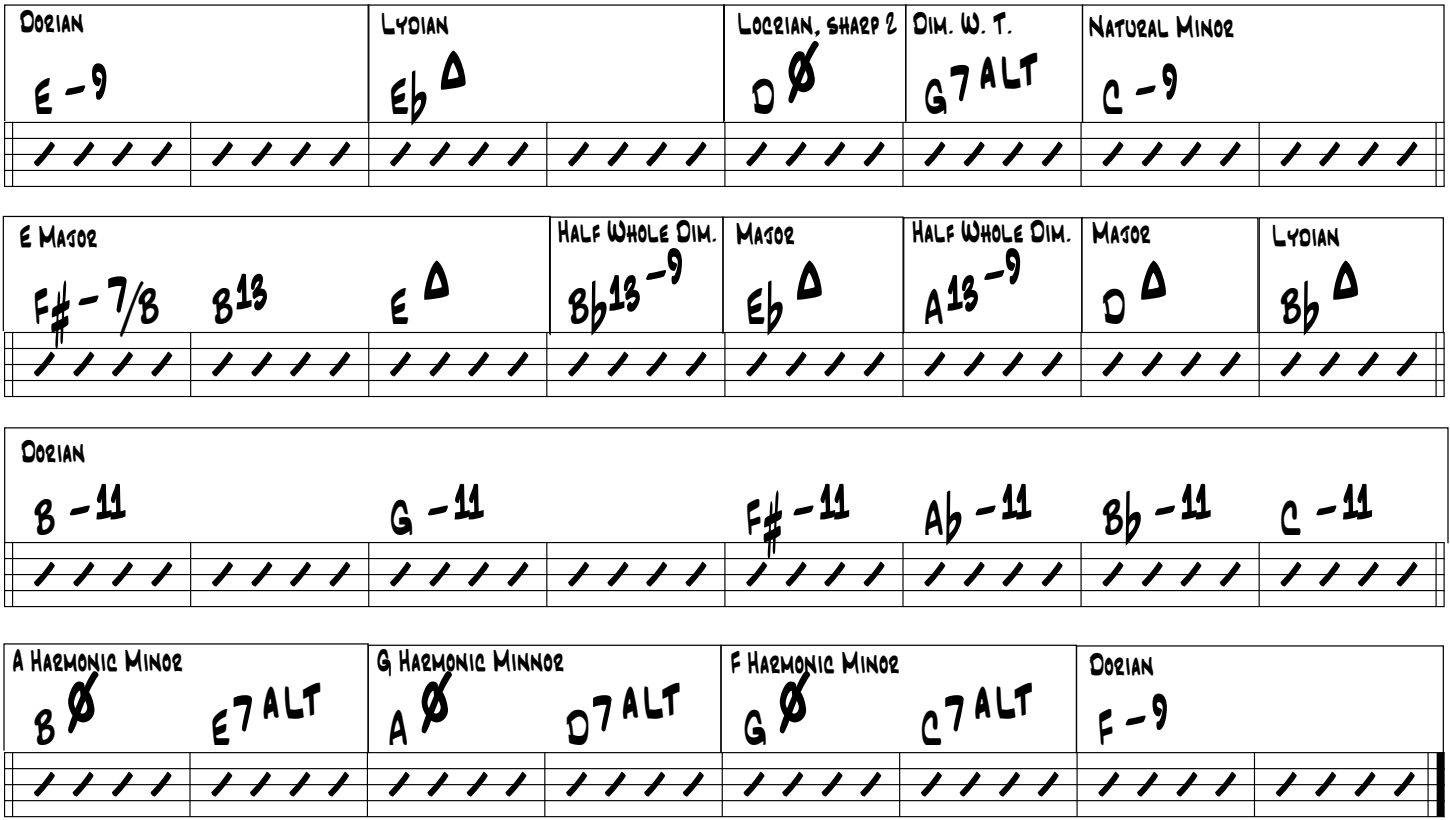

Get a copy of the handout for this session at danhaerle.com/Books/Understanding a Tune.