THE COMPOSITIONAL LANGUAGE OF KENNY WHEELER

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ABSTRACT

The roots of jazz composition are found in the canon of the Great American Songbook, which constitutes the majority of standard jazz repertoire and set the compositional models for jazz. Beginning in the 1960s, leading composers including Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock began stretching the boundaries set by this standard repertoire, with the goal of introducing new compositional elements in order to expand that model. Trumpeter, composer, and arranger Kenny Wheeler has been at the forefront of European jazz music since the late 1960s and his works exemplify a contemporary approach to jazz composition. This paper investigates six pieces from Wheeler's songbook and identifies the compositional elements of his language and how he has developed an original voice through the use and adaptation of these elements. In order to identify these traits, I analyzed the melodic, harmonic, structural and textural aspects of these works by studying both the scores and recordings. Each of the pieces I analyzed demonstrates qualities consistent with Wheeler's compositional style, such as the expansion of tonality through the use of mode mixture, non-functional harmonic progressions, melodic composition through intervallic sequence, use of metric changes within a song form, and structural variation. Finally, the demands of Wheeler's music on the performer are examined.

Résumé

La composition jazz est enracinée dans le Grand répertoire Américan de la chanson, ou "Great American Songbook", qui constitue la plus grande partie du répertoire standard de jazz, et en a défini les principes compositionnels. À partir des années soixante, des compositeurs éminents, tels Wayne Shorter et Herbie Hancock, commencèrent à repousser les limites établies par le répertoire standard, dans le but d'introduire de nouveaux éléments compositionnels qui diversifieraient ce modèle. L'oeuvre du trompettiste, compositeur et arrangeur Kenny Wheeler, à l'avant-plan du jazz Européen depuis la fin des années soixante, illustre une approche contemporaine à la composition. Dans cet essai, j'étudierai six pièces du répertoire de Wheeler, j'identifierai les éléments compositionnels de son langage musical et expliquerai comment le compositeur a développé une voix unique grâce à l'utilisation et l'adaptation de ces éléments. Afin d'identifier ces traits, j'analyserai la structure, les textures, ainsi que les aspects mélodiques et harmoniques de chaque morceau, à l'aide d'enregistrements et de partitions. Dans chacune des pièces analysées, je me pencherai sur les constantes dans le style compositionnel de Wheeler, notamment l'expansion de la tonalité par la substitution de modes, les progressions harmoniques non fonctionnelles, les séquences d'intervalles à la base de la composition mélodique, l'utilisation de changements de métrique dans des formes conventionnelles, et les variations structurelles. Pour finir, j'examinerai les aspects techniques et difficultés dans l'interprétation de la musique de Wheeler.

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Introduction

Kenny Wheeler is a Canadian-born trumpeter, composer and arranger based in London, England, since 1952. He has been at the forefront of the European jazz movement since the late 1960s and his output, a substantial body of work with over 20 commercially released albums and more than 100 recorded compositions, has been released on prominent European-based jazz labels with international distribution, most notably ECM and CAM Jazz. Wheeler's compositional method, which displays a melodic lyricism coupled with an advanced harmonic conception that utilizes mode mixture and non-functional motion, as well as a rhythmic approach that emphasizes straight eighth-note grooves, exemplifies a contemporary jazz approach.

Wheeler was born on January 14, 1930 in Toronto, Ontario. Although born in Canada, Wheeler has spent virtually his entire performing career based in England. He began his professional career working with big bands, most notably John Dankworth's ensemble. Additionally, in what began as an extramural interest and developed into an important element of his musical voice, Wheeler spent time performing with key members of London's free jazz movement, in particular saxophonist Evan Parker, guitarist Derek Bailey and drummer John Stevens. During his formative years, Wheeler studied serial composition with Richard Rodney Bennett and counterpoint with Bill Russo. The music that Wheeler wrote for his first album, *Windmill Tilter* (1969), for Dankworth's band, clearly demonstrates that his compositional style was already formed at this early stage. Along with his work as a leader, he performed regularly with the bands of Anthony Braxton and Dave Holland; was a member of the group "Azimuth" with John

Taylor and Norma Winstone, and was a faculty member for eighteen years at the Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music. Wheeler is one of the most important jazz artists of his generation and his work has had a major influence on many leading international jazz musicians including Dave Holland, Dave Douglas and Canadian Don Thompson, among others.

In this paper, through analysis of six of Wheeler's compositions, I seek to answer the following questions: What are the elements of Kenny Wheeler's compositional language? What compositional elements has Wheeler adapted and how has he created an individual voice through the use and development of these elements? My analysis of the works examined in this paper will be enriched by my own interpretative performance skills as jazz bassist, arranger, and ensemble leader.

The goal of every jazz musician is to develop an original voice; one that stands out within the jazz idiom but is also tied to the tradition and history of the music. All great jazz musicians and composers have developed their sound, their ideas, their improvisational strategies, and their compositional styles into an idiosyncratic, identifiable whole.

The roots of jazz composition are found in the canon of the Great American Songbook, which constitutes the majority of standard jazz repertoire. This includes the works of Tin Pan Alley composers such as George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Jerome Kern, as well as African-American composers such as Duke Ellington and Fats Waller,

whose music included elements of early jazz sources, such as the Blues, Ragtime and Spirituals. Furthermore, devices from Classical music, including "multithematic formal structures…'sophisticated' introductions, interludes and codas…and dramatic cadenzas" could be found in the "symphonic jazz" music created by Ellington, Paul Whiteman and James P. Johnson.[1] Under the banner of Great American Songbook, which unites so many different composers' work, this collection of pieces set the compositional models for jazz, as well as provided a common ground of repertoire for performers to improvise upon. Beginning in the early 1960s, many leading composers, including Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, began to stretch the boundaries set by these standard tunes. All musical spheres were challenged at different points: phrase structure, melody, harmonic motion, tonality, rhythmic settings and other elements. Although Wheeler's contributions came slightly later, beginning in the late 1960s, his compositional conception is very much tied to the same developments that Hancock, Shorter and their peers were working with: introduction of new compositional elements in order to expand the model established by the Great American Songbook.

The development of Wheeler's musical voice, both improvisational and compositional, must be considered in relation to the development of an European jazz style, and to one of the primary sources of an 'European' aesthetic, that of ECM records. As Whitehead notes in *Discover Jazz*, the "indigenous sounds of cultures worldwide have played an important role as source material for new, regional conceptions of jazz."[2] John

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[1] John Howland, *Ellington Uptown: Duke Ellington, James P. Johnson and the Birth of Concert Jazz* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 2.

[2] Kevin Whitehead, "Jazz Worldwide," in *Discover Jazz*, ed. John Edward Hasse and Tad Lathrop (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 296.

Fordham recounts the development of the ECM sound through an anecdote shared by saxophonist Jan Garbarek, one of the foremost European jazz musicians:

> Garbarek reflected on the period in the late 1960s when he had begun to doubt the point of an improvised music in which the lessons of past giants were taken as gospel rather than guidance. 'I suddenly realized,' Garbarek said, 'that the phrase I was about to play was exactly like such-and-such that was usually played at that moment, drawn there because the musical surroundings I was involved in were exactly like that sort of approach, right out of the jazz tradition. That was a very uneasy feeling, to find that I no longer wanted to do that. I stopped for a while, didn't play much. I learned from Miles Davis, that if you do stop, leave space for what others are doing, you get ideas.'
>
> Garbarek's words caught the mood of [the] growing European independence that ECM founder Manfred Eicher was in tune to. Stop, listen, don't play the lick that seems the obvious thing to do next. Explore the music of your own culture, develop a technique that's as responsive to others as possible, make a personal music from whatever comes out of that process.[3]

Fordham acknowledges that a component of the development of the European school of jazz is the incorporation of folk music. The integration of European Art Music, or Classical, influences into jazz was an additional important element. This was apparent in the greater use of straight-eighth note rhythms instead of swing as well as the typically song-like melodies that reflected an influence of 19th century Romanticism. European

[3] John Fordham, "ECM and European Jazz," in *Horizons Touched: The Music of ECM*, ed. Steve Lake and Paul Griffiths (London: Granta, 2007), 13.

jazz musicians were expanding the categories defined by the term jazz by dismissing the compartmentalization of styles. As Bowen states, "electric or acoustic, classical or jazz, European or African – it is all ground for experimentation and improvisation."[4]

An essential component of Wheeler's compositional work is the manner in which he arranges for his small ensembles. Alex Stewart speaks about the relationship between these roles: "In dominant Western musical cultures, as codified in intellectual property laws, composition, arranging, and improvisation are conceptualized as distinct, hierarchically related activities."[5] But, as he continues, "arranging should not be conceptualized as fully separate from the process of composing."[6] Indeed, any jazz composer understands how entwined the elements of composition and arrangement usually are. In Kenny Wheeler's work, there is a higher emphasis placed on ensemble elements than is typical of the average small group composer. One aspect is in the way that the melody is delivered. In his pieces, the melody is distributed throughout the ensemble, often with all members – barring the drums – having a moment in the spotlight. Another consideration is the order of soloists. Rather than taking the standard jam session approach of running down the front line players then through the rhythm section in sequence (piano, guitar, bass and finally drums), Wheeler uses a different solo order for each piece that best brings the unique qualities of the composition to light. In fact, he will sometimes write a secondary solo section that is perhaps better suited to one of his band members, rather than have everyone perform on the same chord sequence.

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[4] José Antonio Bowen, "Jazz Forward," in *Discover Jazz*, ed. John Edward Hasse and Tad Lathrop (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 331.
[5] Alex Stewart, *Making the Scene: Contemporary New York City Big Band Jazz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 17.
[6] Ibid., 18.

Another important aspect is how Wheeler often breaks his ensembles into smaller units. Many pieces in his oeuvre begin with solo introductions that are often rubato statements of the theme or free improvisations. His groups are frequently broken into components that feature duo and trio passages interspersed with the full ensemble. Furthermore, musician entrances are often staggered, such as in "May Ride", where the full six-piece ensemble isn't heard until the second statement of the theme, beginning at 4'05'', over halfway through the piece. The use of rubato passages for introductions and endings is also a consideration of significance, one that allows time and space to become distinctive elements in his compositions. For example, choosing guitarist Bill Frisell to play the first two statements of the theme to "Nicolette" in a rubato manner makes his idiosyncratic sound and distinguishable pacing stand out. Alternatively, inserting a free improvisation section in the middle of "Miold Man" allows saxophonist Stan Sulzmann and drummer Billy Elgart to provide a musical contribution they would have been unable to create if performing over the solo form of the piece. The use of these arranging techniques makes it apparent that every possible detail in Wheeler's compositions is carefully considered and developed.

Methodology:

The purpose of analyzing jazz compositions is to identify distinct elements within the works that display the unique traits of a great composer's individual voice. This in turn can be used to point to new directions for development as other musicians strive to develop their own musical identity. It is through examining these traits that one can

establish general trends in the artist's work, and then apply these trends in a personal manner to develop one's own individual voice. By analyzing Wheeler's compositions, I have gained a greater understanding of particular details within them as well as of greater themes within his overall body of work.

In order to understand the key identifying elements of Wheeler's compositional style, I investigated his unpublished hand-written original scores. Given the importance of aural transmission in jazz performance practices, I also delved into his recorded output in order to facilitate the analysis of his scores. As part of my research, I contacted Nick Smart, head of jazz programs at the Royal Academy of Music in London, England, and arranged a visit to view their archive of Wheeler's works. During my trip to London in September 2012, I worked extensively in the Wheeler archive at the Royal Academy, where I collected copies of many of Wheeler's original manuscripts. After reviewing his works, I selected six pieces upon which I will concentrate my investigation. They span most of the length of his recorded career and best represent the main characteristics of his compositional voice. Furthermore, these works significantly extend the scholarship on Wheeler's work, as the only existing studies (Herbert, 2000,[7] and Morgan, 1993[8]) examine selections from just two of Wheeler's recordings.

I analyzed the melodic, harmonic, structural and textural elements of these works by studying both the scores and recordings. Where multiple performances of recordings

[7] Michael Herbert, "New Directions in Jazz Compositions as Evidenced in the Works of Three Composers: Kenny Wheeler, Don Grolnick, and Russell Ferrante" (MMus thesis, Duquesne University, 2000).

[8] David Scott Morgan, "Harmony and Tonality in the Recent Compositions of Kenny Wheeler" (M.Mus. Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1993).

existed, I took into consideration the date of performance and changes between performances and the score. To enhance the analytical process, I interviewed Norma Winstone, an important collaborator of Wheeler's, who provided information about their many projects together. Each of the works I analyzed demonstrates qualities consistent with Wheeler's compositional style, such as the expansion of tonality through the use of mode mixture, non-functional harmonic progressions, melodic composition through intervallic sequence, use of metric changes within a song form, and structural variation.

I organized the six selected compositions in chronological order. Although each work is examined fully, I would like to highlight the following elements of each piece. "Sancho" from *Windmill Tilter* (1969) and "S'matta" from *Gnu High* (1976) I will use to discuss mixed metres in Wheeler's compositions. With "May Ride" from *Around 6* (1980) and "W.W." from *Double, Double You* (1984), I will discuss harmonic devices particular to Wheeler's language: an infrequently used mode of the melodic minor scale and a synthetic chord in the case of "May Ride", and non-functional harmonic movement in the case of "W.W." Finally, in "Miold Man" from *Flutter By, Butterfly* (1988), and "Nicolette" from *Angel Song* (1997), I will examine melodic sequencing in his composing and how it impacts the form of his pieces.

Chapter 1: "Sancho"

Kenny Wheeler's first album *Windmill Tilter* was written for and recorded by John Dankworth's orchestra in 1968. He had been a regular member of Dankworth's ensemble for over five years beginning in 1959, but was working as a free-lance musician in 1967 when he encountered some non-musical problems. Wheeler had a wisdom tooth that needed to be removed, leaving a large hole in his mouth that required time to heal. According to Wheeler,

> 'I had a wisdom tooth out and at the time they said it was impacted, which meant they had to dig quite a big hole in my jaw, and I was told I couldn't play for at least three months…At that very moment, as soon as he knew I was going to have to take this time off, John [Dankworth] asked me if I'd like to write an album for the band. This was a great opportunity for me, and so that's how I filled those three months.'[9]

Despite the unusual circumstances that initiated the writing of the music, *Windmill Tilter* is recognized as an important artistic statement by Wheeler, with many of the essential elements of his musical language present. Wheeler states that the time he spent composing the music for *Windmill Tilter* "turned out to be one of the most productive three months of my life. For all this music I'd been sort of hearing and wanting to write for a big band did sort of come together for that album."[10] The album

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[9] Alyn Shipton, Liner Notes, *Windmill Tilter,* Kenny Wheeler and the John Dankworth Orchestra, Beat Goes On BGOCD944, 2010, compact disc.

[10] Gene Lees, "Come Back Last Summer: Kenny Wheeler," in *Arranging the Score: Portraits of the Great Arrangers* (London: Cassell, 2000), 30.

had an impact on many people, including guitarist John Abercrombie, who noticed the importance the album plays in establishing many of Wheeler's compositional ideas. He says, "[It is] an amazing record. You can hear where Kenny's going to go."[11]

"Sancho", the fifth track from *Windmill Tilter*, features multiple metric settings. Jazz compositions that change metre, although not unheard of (Bill Evans' 1962 recording of Earl Zindars' "How My Heart Sings" is one example), were still quite rare in the late 1960s. As Ted Pease notes in his book *Jazz Composition: Theory and Practice,* "the roots of jazz…took hold in…duple meter…[and] to this day, most jazz is written and played in 4/4 time with a swing feel." He continues, "in the 1950s and 1960s, the jazz waltz became fashionable…[and] other time signatures began to pop up after Dave Brubeck's multi-metric album *Time Out* was issued."[12] (178).

"Sancho" also demonstrates the early use of other important elements of Wheeler's compositional language, including mode mixture in the harmony, and perfect fourth intervals in the melody.

The rhythmic setting of "Sancho" is primarily in 3/4, yet Wheeler ventures away from this time signature by utilizing bars of 4/4 for brief durations to create rhythmic interest. The beginning is 25 bars long, which begins with six bars of alternating 4/4 and 3/4. This could also be considered to be three measures of 7/4, written as alternating bars

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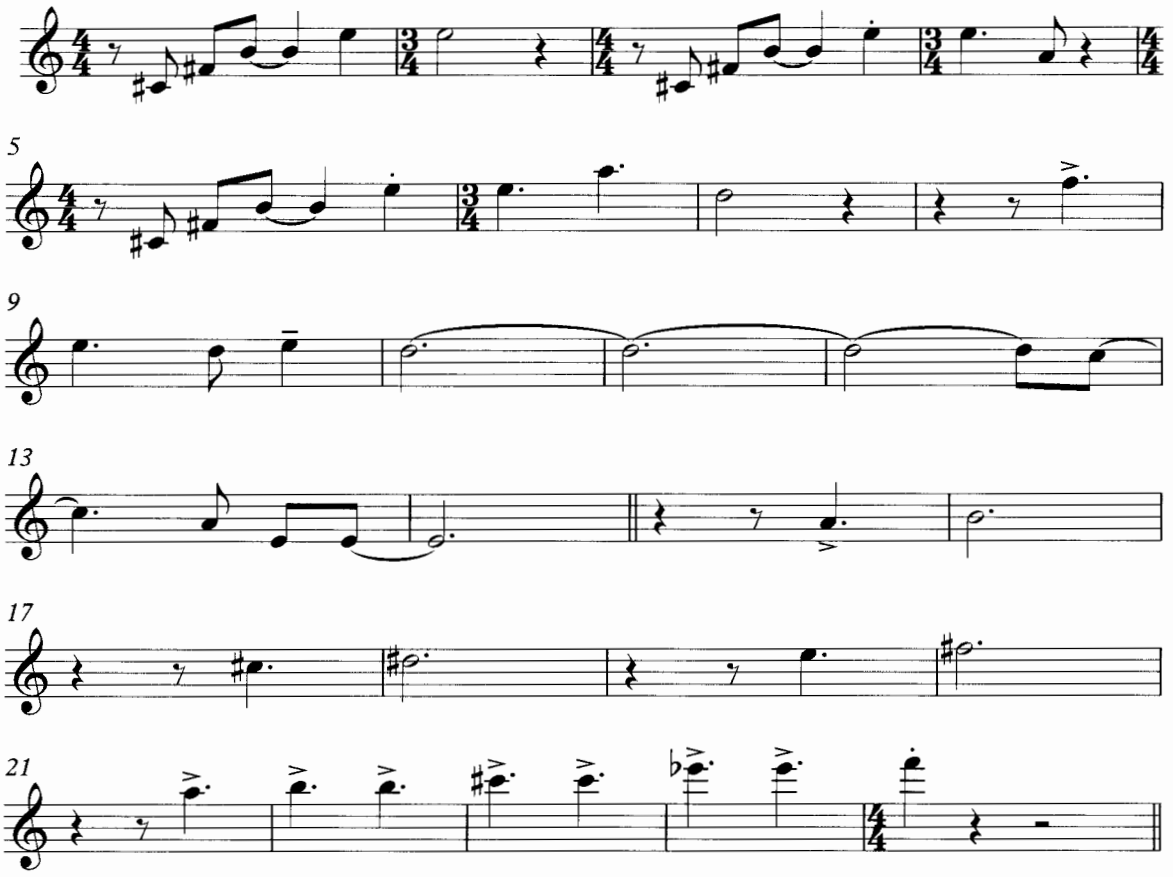
[11] Ibid., 33.
[12] Ted Pease, *Jazz Composition: Theory and Practice* (Boston: Berklee Press, 2003), 178.

of 4 and 3 in order to facilitate sight-reading. The melody of "Sancho" can be seen in Example 1.1, which shows the metric changes of the beginning.

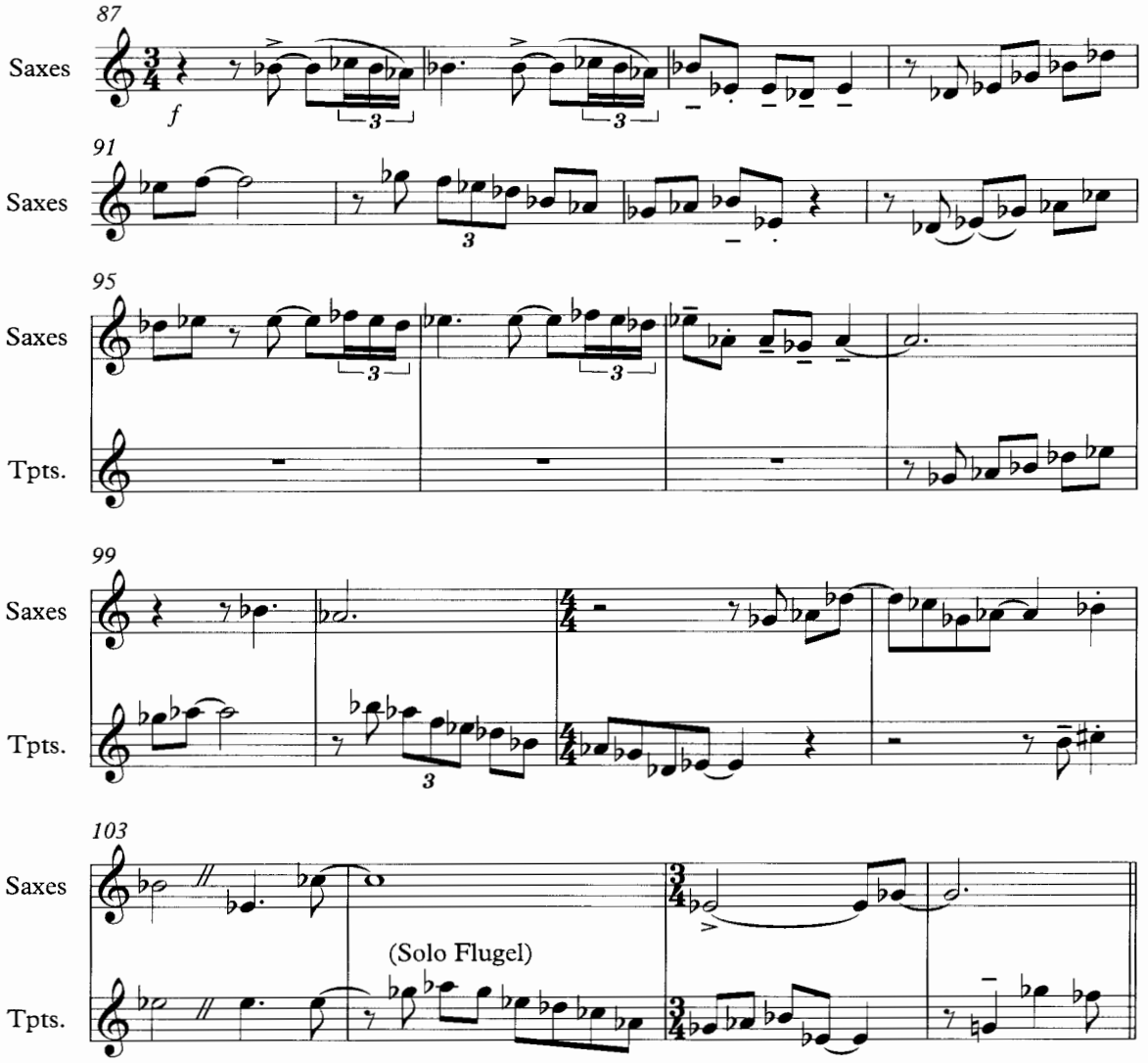
Ex. 1.1. Opening bars of "Sancho."



The mixed metres at the opening of "Sancho" create a sense of temporary confusion, as the listener waits for a consistent metre to be established. After the first six bars, the piece continues in ¾ until the final measure of the first ending, which returns to 4/4. This highlights the sense of rhythmic uncertainty in the beginning of the piece, drawing the listener in, sparking interest as one waits for the theme to develop.

The rhythmic development continues later in the piece as well. After the alto saxophone solo, an ensemble section sets up the flugelhorn solo that follows. By this point in the composition, the 3/4 metre is firmly entrenched. However, six bars before the end of the form of the ensemble chorus, Wheeler inserts four measures in 4/4. This intensifies the musical development that is occurring, creating a rhythmic element that heightens the strength of the ensemble chorus, which is already being enhanced through the contrapuntal lines in the ensemble and greater dynamics. This section is shown in Example 1.2.

Ex. 1.2. Main themes of ensemble section in "Sancho."



In addition to the metric challenges present in this composition, there are other examples of an artist pushing boundaries. As shown in Example 1.1, the opening theme features extensive use of perfect fourth intervals. Another instance occurs after the opening, where a transition from the D minor tonality used at the beginning moves towards Ab Aeolian, the key used during improvisations. In measure 35, Wheeler begins a repeated figure that outlines an Abm7b6 chord. What is especially interesting is his

voicing for this chord, which features minor ninth intervals. In *Modern Jazz Voicings*, the authors, under the title "Beware Minor Ninths" offer the following disclaimer: "when you want a well-focused chord sound that can be heard clearly, *do not* include the interval of a minor ninth in the voicing. Eventually…you might want to experiment with the dissonance and harmonic ambiguity that minor ninths provide…[which] can be very expressive and can trigger a strong emotional response in the listener." [13] The instruction from this book, which maintains that the minor ninth intervals in voicings should generally be avoided (aside from the obvious exceptions on dominant seventh chords and in certain modal contexts), reflects a conservative approach to chord voicing. In a modal setting, such as "Sancho", the arrangement of notes in chord voicings can be less rigorous.

The figure, shown in Example 1.3, begins in the piano, and is then spread throughout the ensemble. Wheeler exploits the minor ninth interval, placing the minor third (Cb) above the ninth (Bb), then the flat thirteenth (Fb) above the fifth (Eb). Wheeler's use of this voicing makes it clear that he is not willing to be constrained by traditional boundaries in his work.

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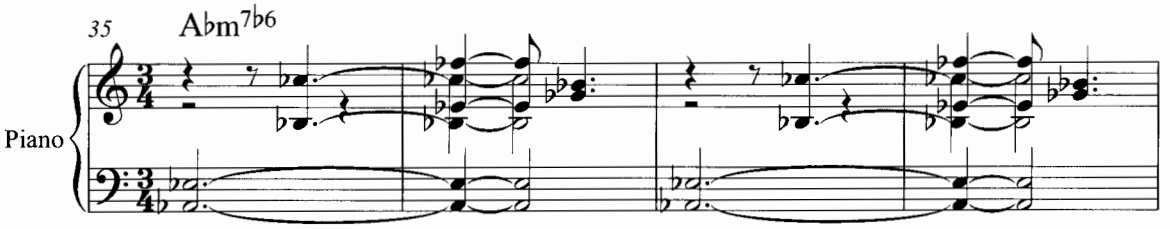
[13] Ted Pease, and Ken Pullig, *Modern Jazz Voicings: Arranging for Small and Medium Ensembles*, ed. Michael Gold (Boston: Berklee Press, 2001), 35. It should be noted that minor ninth intervals have been used successfully as early as 1949 with the *Birth of the Cool* recordings. Nevertheless, Pease and Pullig's textbook reinforces the standard pedagogical practice that this interval is generally problematic and should be used only by experienced arrangers who clearly understand the fundamental techniques of chord voicing.

Ex. 1.3. Minor Ninths used in voicing in "Sancho."

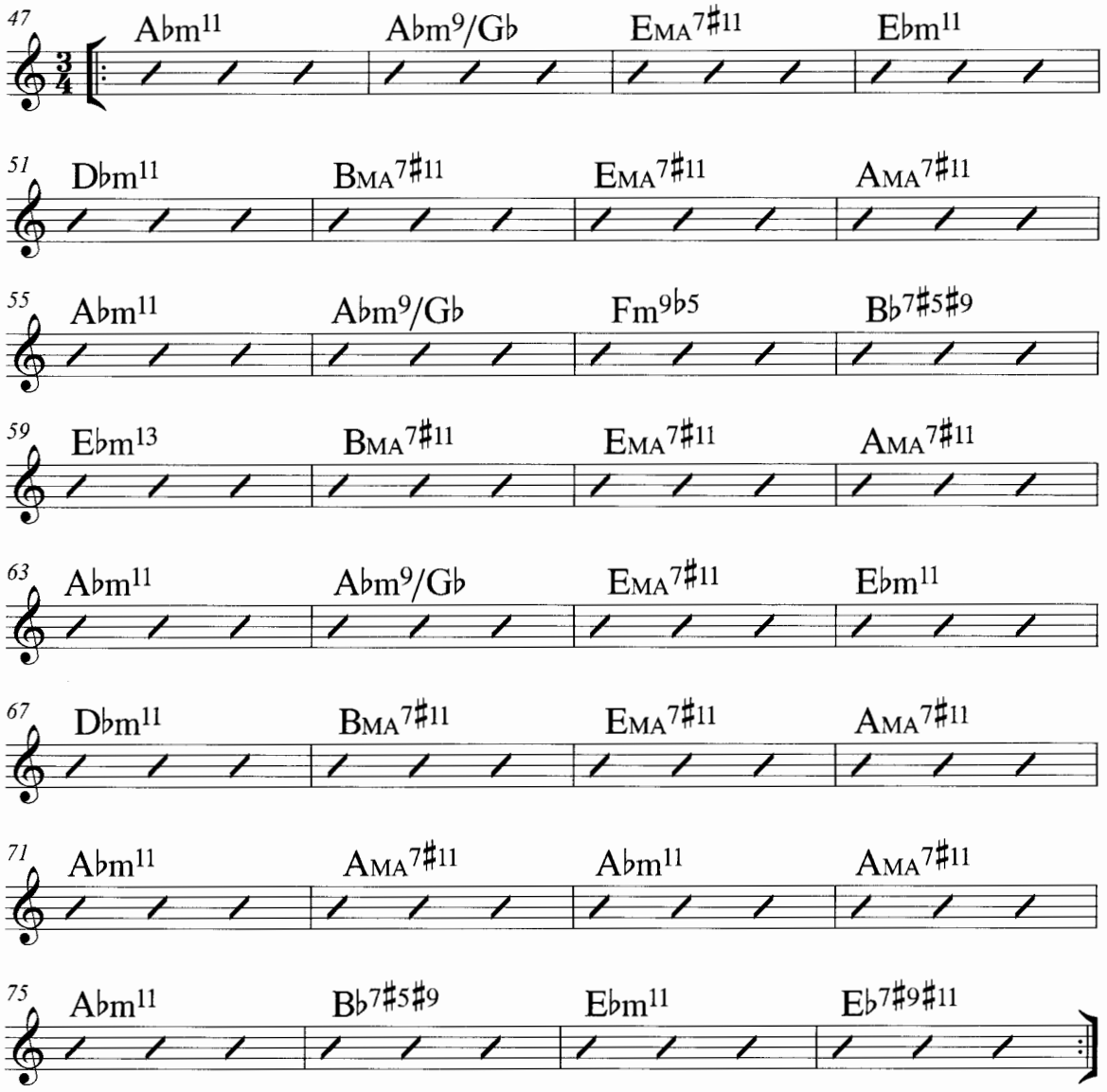


The harmony used for the improvisations in "Sancho" shows that Wheeler is already utilizing modal interchange at this early stage. Pease defines modal interchange, also known as mode mixture, as "when a diatonic chord from one tonality or modality is borrowed for use in another tonality or modality."[14]

Example 1.4 shows the chord sequence used during the solo section.

[14] Pease, *Jazz Composition: Theory and Practice*, 76.

Ex. 1.4. Chord changes of solo section in "Sancho."



The harmonic framework is fairly straightforward, but there are a few interesting things to note that point to the Wheeler sound. The piece has a 32-bar ABAC structure that is common to the works of the Great American Songbook. However, instead of the usual tonal practices used in these works, "Sancho" derives its harmonic materials from different modes of Ab. In this regard, "Sancho" is a clear example of Wheeler working to expand this traditional framework. It is important to point out that in the descending root

motion of the first four bars (which is repeated in the second half of the solo form), Wheeler uses a minor seventh structure for his V chord (Ebm11), which is borrowed from Ab Dorian and enhances the modal sound of the piece. Another important detail is that the solo section contains only three dominant structure chords, as Wheeler chooses to primarily use major 7#11 Lydian chords to lead back to his tonic chord. The motion of Ama7#11 resolving to Abm11 is Phrygian-related cadence of bIIma7-Imi11.[15] This harmonic motion is used often by Wheeler in his work, and will reappear in other works examined later in this paper. Another element of importance takes place in bars 59 and 60, with the chord Ebm11 moving down to Bma7#11 demonstrating descending root motion of a major third. The bulk of the harmonic activity in "Sancho" moves by either step-wise or perfect fourth root motion, which is more typical of standard, as opposed to contemporary jazz harmony. Root motion of a third is a significant contemporary sound, and its use early in Wheeler's career shows him already moving beyond standard harmonies.

In "Sancho", it is apparent that many elements of Wheeler's compositional voice are already in use. The piece demonstrates the work of a composer who, through the use of mixed metres, mode mixture, and an intervallic melody, is committed to developing his own contemporary jazz language. It also shows Wheeler to be a composer who wants to create works that provide challenges to himself and his fellow musicians during their performance.

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[15] Technically, this isn't a pure Phrygian cadence, as the Abmi11 chord symbol includes a natural ninth, signifying the use of Dorian or possibly Aeolian mode over the tonic chord. However, the essential point about this cadence is the fact that the bIIma7#11 chord is borrowed from Ab Phrygian.

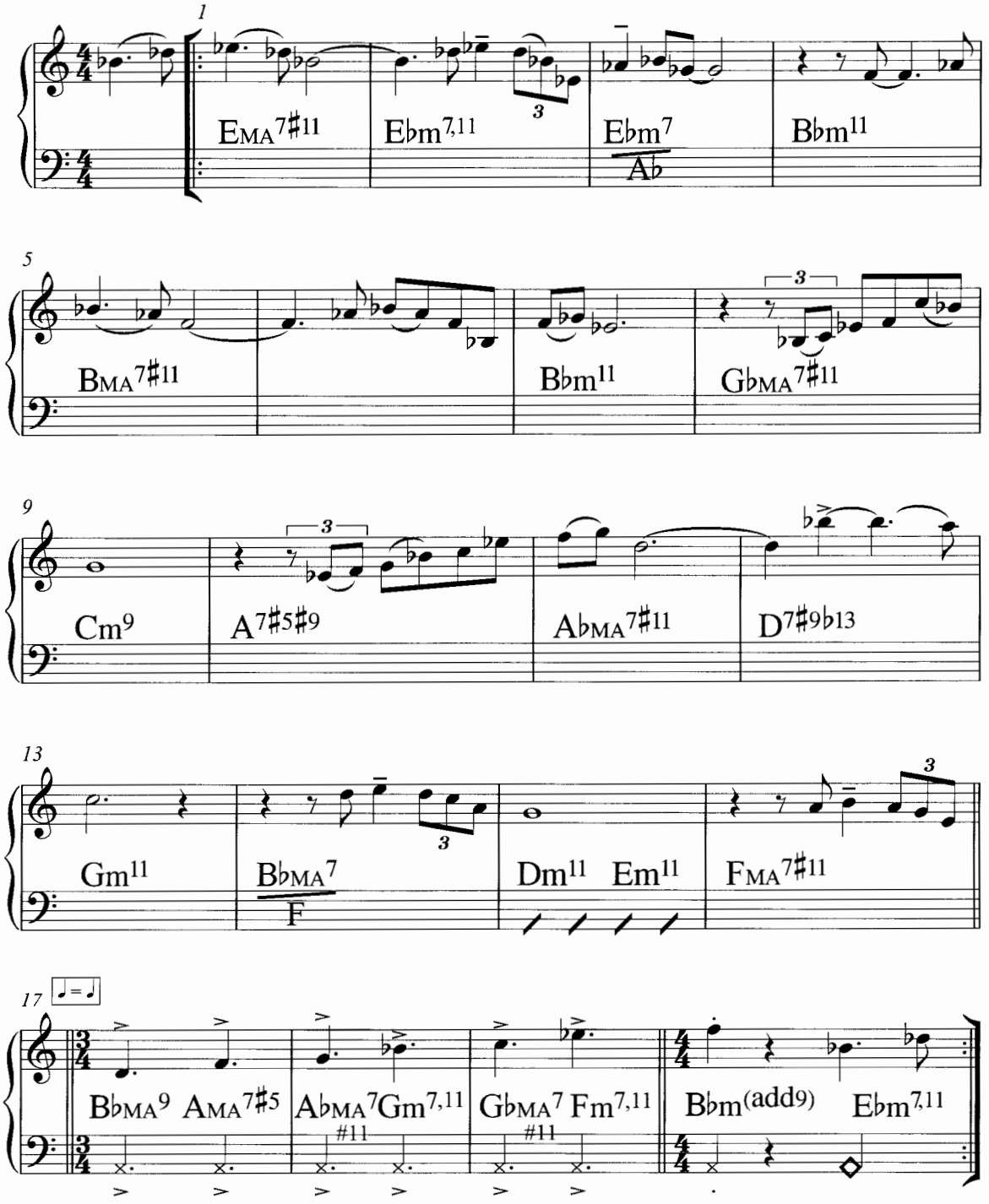
Chapter 2: "Smatta"

Wheeler's first recording for ECM was *Gnu High*, recorded in 1975 and released in 1976. The album features music written for jazz quartet and finds Wheeler joined by internationally-recognised jazz artists Keith Jarrett on piano, Dave Holland on bass, and Jack DeJohnette on drums.

The middle track from *Gnu High*, sandwiched between a pair of extended works, is "Smatta". In this short piece, Wheeler develops many of the compositional elements found in "Sancho": harmonically, it features extensive use of mode mixture to establish a key, rather than a traditional tonal centre of major or minor; melodically, it demonstrates thorough use of the pentatonic scale; and rhythmically, it uses mixed meters, moving between 4/4 and 3/4.

Example 2.1 shows a basic leadsheet of "Smatta": a twenty bar structure with sixteen measures in 4/4, followed by three measures of 3/4 and a final bar of 4/4.

Ex. 2.1. "Smatta."


1
EMA7♯11
Ebm7,11
Ebm7
Ab
Bbm11
5
BMA7♯11
Bbm11
GbMA7♯11
9
Cm9
A7♯5♯9
AbMA7♯11
D7♯9♭13
13
Gm11
BbMA7
F
Dm11 Em11
FMA7♯11
17
♩=♩
BbMA9 AMA7♯5
AbMA7Gm7,11
#11
GbMA7 Fm7,11
#11
Bbm(add9)
Ebm7,11

The rhythmic relationship between duple and triple metre is further stressed during the 3/4 section of the piece, as Wheeler splits these bars into two, with both the melody and harmony changing at a rate of dotted quarter notes. This demanding rhythmic structure remains intact for improvisations as well, challenging the soloists as they switch between 4/4 and 3/4. As Sturm notes, Wheeler's "frequent metre changes don't burden [his] lines or phrase constructions, and the resulting combination of elements tend to organically 'blur' the barlines."[16] By composing a melody that shifts between the two metres so smoothly, Wheeler creates a setting in which the metric changes seem natural, even expected, rather than forced.

The melody and harmony of "Smatta" present an important contemporary compositional technique. In standard works, the harmonic and melodic components act together to present a united display of tonality. In "Smatta", Wheeler's harmony and melody each present their own tonal message, which softens the tonality and makes the piece sound more modern.

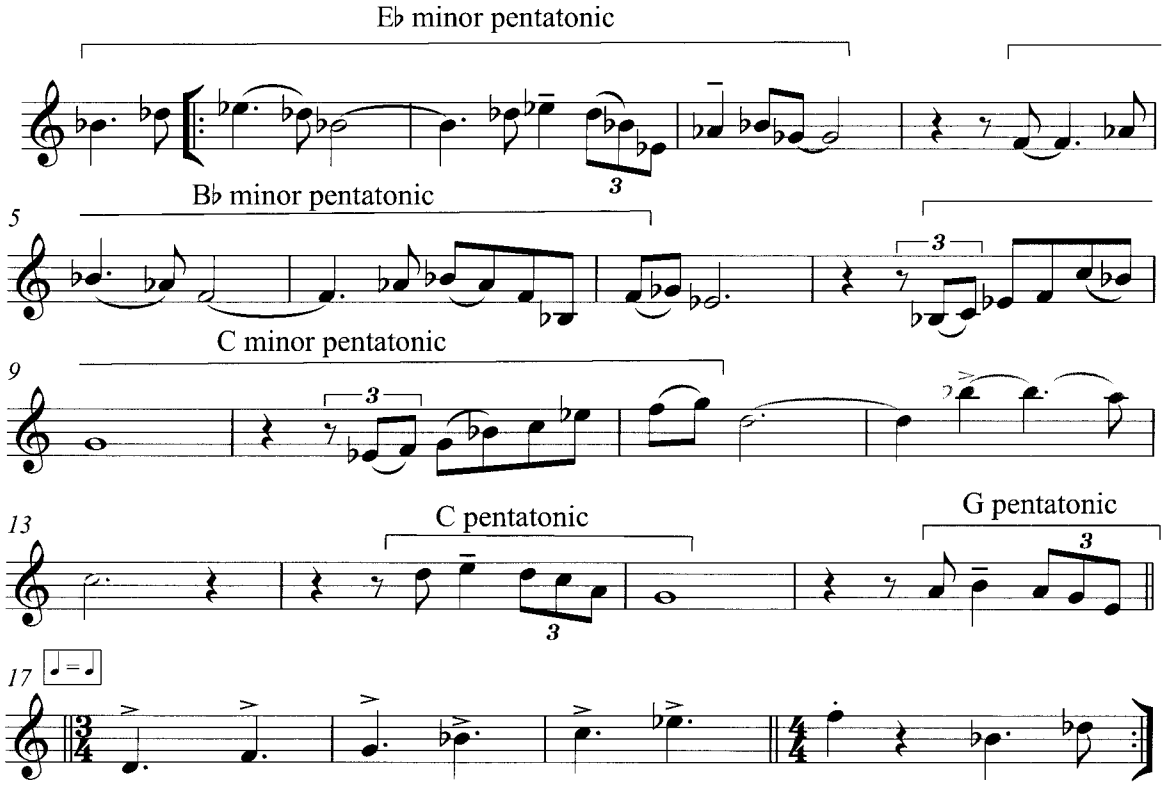
The melody at the beginning of "Smatta" is clearly delineating the key of Eb minor. As shown in Example 2.1, the melody from the pickup through to the end of bar seven is definitive of Eb minor. From this perspective, it seems that the Ema7#11 chord is bII, tonicizing the Imi chord. In the following four bars, Wheeler repeats the same message transposed down a perfect fourth, with the motion of Bma7#11 moving to Bbm11 seeming to act as bVIma7#11 to Vm11. But during the improvisation section when the melody is no longer present, it now sounds like Ebm11 is IVm11 in the key of

[16] Fred Sturm, "Kenny Wheeler: Evolved Simplicity," *Jazz Educator's Journal* 30, no. 5 (1998): 46.

Bb. Thus, the harmony is presenting the message that the piece is in Bb minor, with a tonicization of the IV chord occurring in the first four bars, then the tonicization of Bbmi taking place in the next four bars. Wheeler continues to cloud the tonality later in the piece, especially in the last four measures, where the melody is stating its message in Bb major, while the harmony, a mixed mode grouping of chords, ends in Bb minor. This passage is discussed in further detail below.

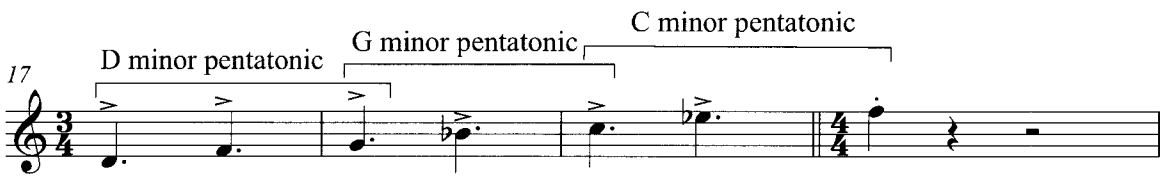
An important consideration of the melodic structure of "Smatta" is that it is almost completely comprised of pentatonic scales. The two-note pickup to the form as well as the first three bars use Eb minor pentatonic. Bars five through eight are made up of Bb pentatonic, with the exception of the Gb in bar seven, which is used to prepare the Gbma7 chord in bar eight, as well as add to mixed tonal messages mentioned above. The next segment of the melody in bars eight through the beginning of eleven uses C minor pentatonic. Wheeler moves to A minor pentatonic for his idea in bars 14 and 15, then repeats this same melody down a perfect fourth to E minor pentatonic, mirroring the melodic and harmonic movement at the beginning of the piece.

Ex. 2.2. "S'matta" melodic construction.



The last four bars of "Smatta" are built from a melodic sequence of an ascending minor third moving to an ascending whole tone. Although this isn't a complete pentatonic scale, each bar can be considered a fragment of a pentatonic scale. Example 2.3 shows the fragments of each scale. For example, the D and F from measure 17, combined with the pitch G at the beginning of measure 18, are the first three notes of a D minor pentatonic scale. Measures 18 and the first half of 19 form the beginning of a G minor pentatonic, while measure 19 and 20 use the first three pitches of C minor pentatonic. As a result, this melodic sequence functions as an encapsulation of the pentatonic sound and summarizes the melodic conception for the piece as a whole.

Ex. 2.3. Final four bars of "Smatta."



The sole segment of the melody of "Smatta" that isn't composed of the pentatonic scale is the section that extends from the final three beats of bar eleven (the D natural on beat two) through bars twelve and thirteen (marked in red in Example 2.2). But it is important to note that this melodic fragment is made up of just four notes (D, Bb, A and C); as such, it continues the atmosphere established by the pentatonic sound.

The harmonic structure of "Smatta" is built from what is best deemed a mixed-mode approach to the tonal area of Bb. It can't be established as strictly from Bb major or minor, but rather borrows its materials from all areas relating to the overall sound of Bb. The beginning of the piece uses Ema7#11 to tonicize Ebmi7, the same Phrygian-related cadence used in "Sancho". Together with the melody, this is then repeated a perfect fourth lower in the key of Bb minor. As such, the opening four bars represent a tonicization of the IV minor tonal area before moving to the home key of Bb. The harmony in bars nine through twelve begins a transition, where Wheeler begins shifting towards the tonal area of F, the dominant of Bb. This is established first through the tonicization of Abma7 by the dominant structure A7#5#9, and then by the D7#5#9 chord which prepares Gmi7 in bar 13 as the IImi chord in F. During the last four bars, where the harmony moves down chromatically from I to V, Wheeler eschews any dominant structure chords, instead using major 7, major 7 augmented and minor 7 chords

exclusively. This makes the passage sound more modal than tonal, further disguising the tonality. To further this cause, Wheeler uses a modal cadence of Vmi7 to lead to Imin7. It is important to point out that Wheeler begins this passage on Bbma7 and ends on Bbmin7, which reinforces the view that he's operating with a wider sense of Bb as a tonal area, rather than a major or minor tonality.

What is also apparent in the harmonic progression of "Smatta" is that Wheeler is strongly moving away from the more standard harmonic approach used in "Sancho". One particular aspect that gives "Smatta" a contemporary feeling is the lack of root motion resolving down by perfect fifth. Naus states that in pieces from standard jazz repertoire, "chord progression and, therefore root motion, is most often down a fifth or in a cycle [of fifths motion]...[which] creates...strong forward motion that at the same time feels extremely grounded into a key area."[17] He also notes that one of the main differences between contemporary and standard pieces "is that the contemporary style most often does not contain cycle [of fifths] movement...the grounded feeling established in cycle [of fifths] root motion is replaced with a floating feeling.[18] This floating feeling to the harmony is most apparent in the solo section, where Wheeler reduces the chord structure used during the melody to its essentials. The chords to the solo section of "Smatta" are shown in Example 2.4.

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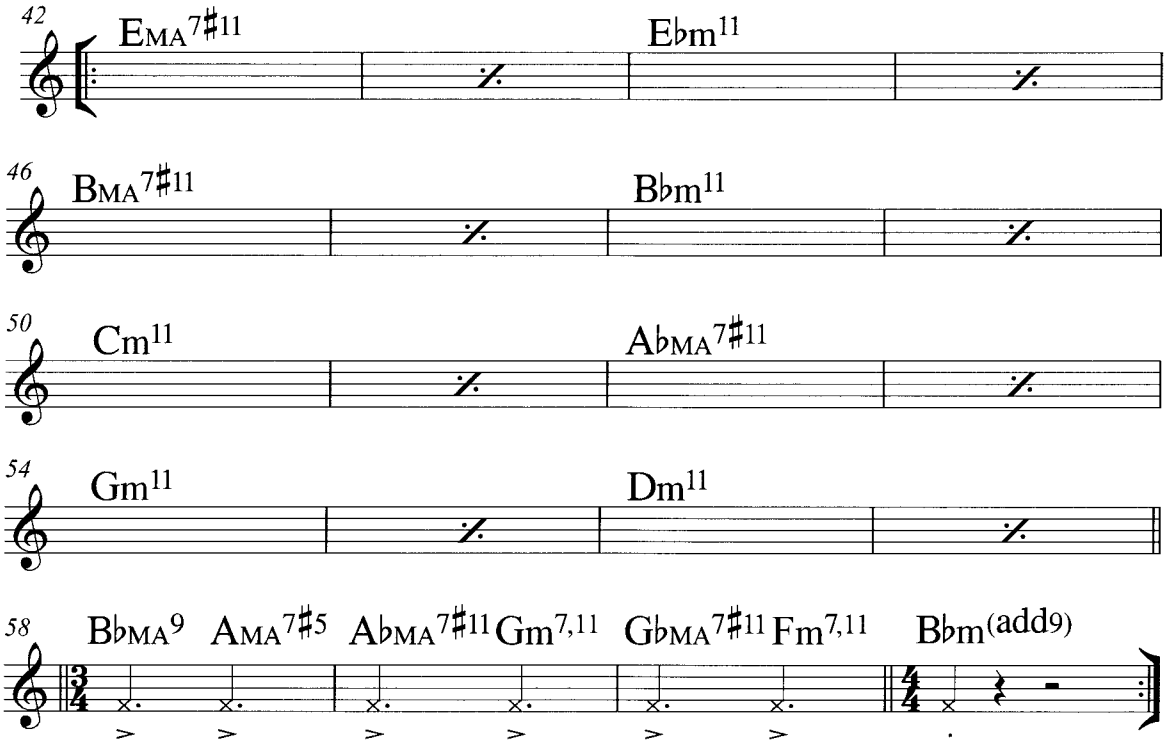
[17] Wayne J. Naus, *Beyond Functional Harmony* (Rottenburg: Advance Music, 1998), 32.
[18] Ibid.

Ex. 2.4. Solo chord changes of "Smatta."



An important aesthetic consideration in "Smatta" is a rubato statement of the melody that functions as the piece's introduction. This is a device used frequently by Wheeler. He performs the initial melody statement in a duet with piano accompaniment, which sets an intimate atmosphere at the beginning of the piece. The rhythm section enters for the final four measures of the form, with the dotted quarter note punches driving the 3/4 metre. At this point, the medium-fast tempo is set and the piece moves forward brightly. What is unusual, though, is the return to rubato after improvisations, which is marked in the original score as a da capo. Following the piano solo, the rhythm section drops out, and pianist Jarrett performs the melody solo before the bass and drums again enter in the last four bars, and tempo is restored until the end.

"Smatta" shows Wheeler refining his compositional ideas, moving further from the general boundaries set by the works of the Great American Songbook. He has created an unusual song structure of twenty bars that incorporates both 3/4 and 4/4, and moved beyond major or minor tonality into a wider view of the key of Bb. Perhaps most importantly, he's presenting a new approach to composition in which the melody and harmony do not constantly offer the same message about the tonality of the piece.

Chapter 3: "May Ride"

Wheeler's recording *Around 6* (1980) displayed his musical voice within a six-piece ensemble. This album featured significant European jazz artists, including saxophonist Evan Parker, vibraharpist Tom van der Geld, and bassist J.F. Jenny-Clark.

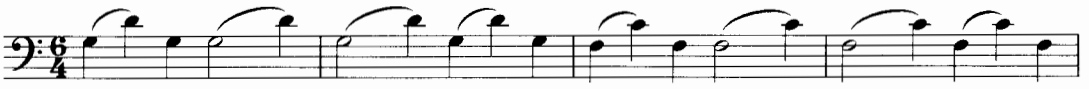
"May Ride", the third track from *Around 6*, presents a different compositional model utilized by Wheeler. As typified in the works of the Great American Songbook, a standard song form uses the melodic structure, and its corresponding harmonies as the basis for improvisation. Instead of this standard approach, Wheeler utilizes a four-bar vamp for improvisations and binds it with a melodic structure that functions as an interlude between each solo. Another important compositional detail used often in Wheeler's work, presented for the first time in this paper, is the use of transposition as a means to develop the structure of the song.

Norma Winstone, in a telephone interview with me, noted that "[Wheeler's] harmonic sense is very different than anything that [she had] come across before."[19] "May Ride" begins with a bassline that establishes a 6/4 metre and sets up a four-bar vamp: two bars of G and two bars of F, each defined solely by roots and fifths (shown in Example 3.1). As the vibraharp enters to begin a solo over this vamp, the harmonic world is expanded substantially. The sound build over the G root is Abma7#5/G, which is the second mode of F melodic minor. Over the F root, the structure is E/F, a mixed modal flavour of F that stacks the two triads on top of each other, resulting in the pitches F, G#,

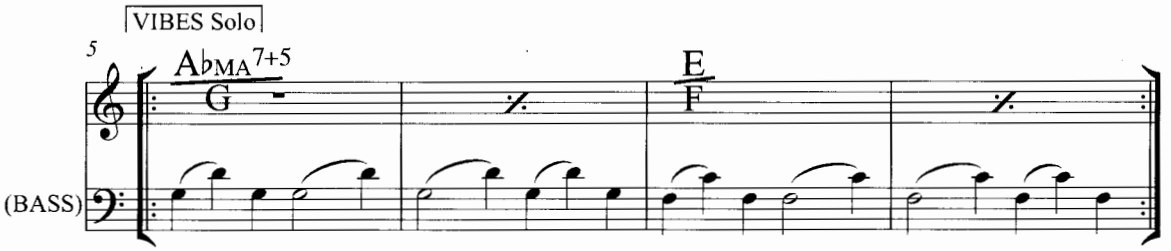
[19] Norma Winstone, telephone interview, March 14, 2013.

A, B, C, E. This synthesizes an Fma7#9#11 chord, which is derived from the 6th mode of A harmonic minor. However, as the chord symbol indicates, there is a duality of sound within this structure. If one reconsiders this chord with the E triad as the centre of the sound, located over a foreign root, it can also be considered a 'major phrygian'-type sound, with the notes of the F triad providing semi-tone resolutions to the pitches of the E triad. Both of these sounds are part of the standard Wheeler lexicon, turning up in many of his compositions.

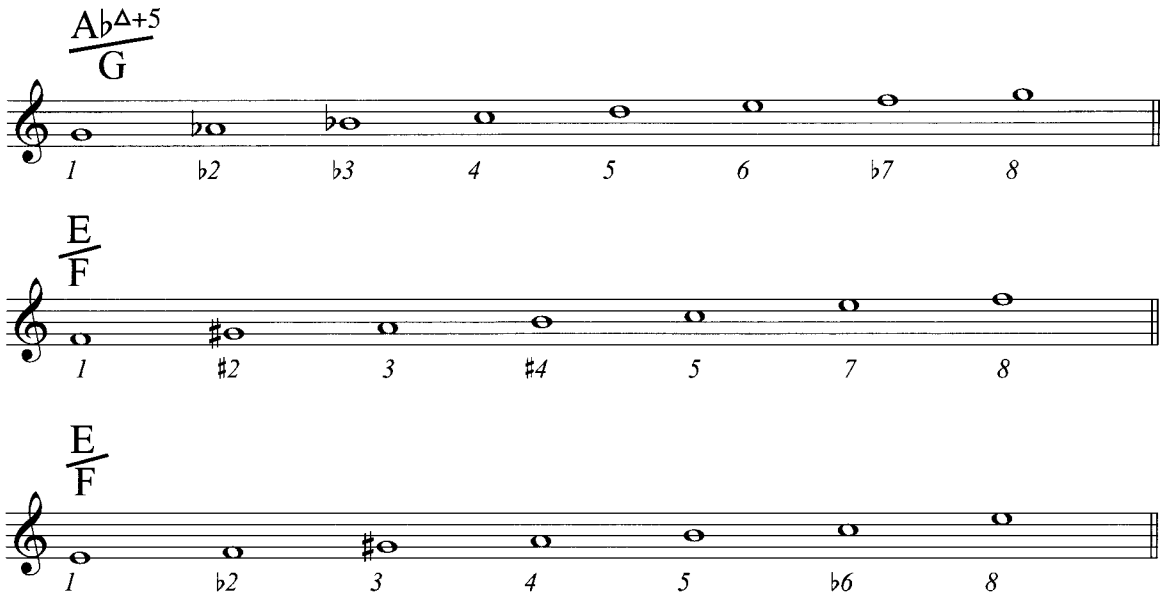
Ex. 3.1. Opening bassline from "May Ride."



Ex. 3.2. Opening Vamp for vibraphone solo.



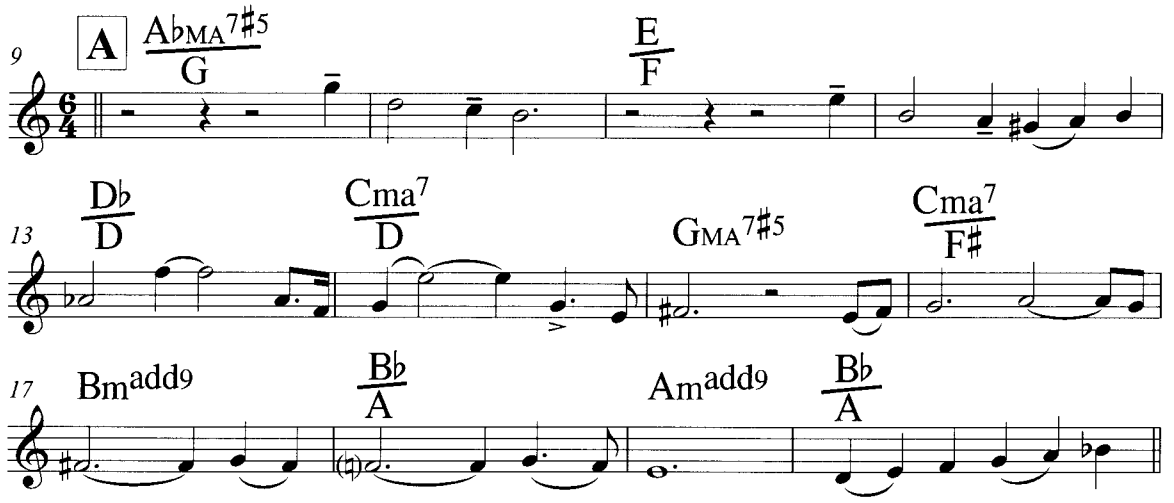
Ex. 3.3. Scales corresponding to vamp harmony on "May Ride."



In "May Ride", Wheeler created a modal vamp as the basis for the improvisations that utilizes unusual sounds that were rare for the period. Earlier modal pieces such as "So What" and "Milestones" used stepwise root motion to establish the shifting sonorities of the differing sections of the pieces, but used modes of the major scales exclusively. Wheeler expanded this basic model in two ways: first, he moved beyond modes of the major scale into a less commonly used mode of the melodic minor scale and the synthetic E/F; secondly, he utilized duality in his harmony, as the movement between Abma7#5/G to E/F provides step-wise root motion, while in the upper structures, an Ab augmented triad moving to an E triad exhibits motion of a major third.

The tonal duality presented during the vamp is continued in the melody. Example 3.4 shows the A section of "May Ride" (mm. 9-20), during which the first statement of the melody is heard.

Ex. 3.4. "May Ride" A Section.

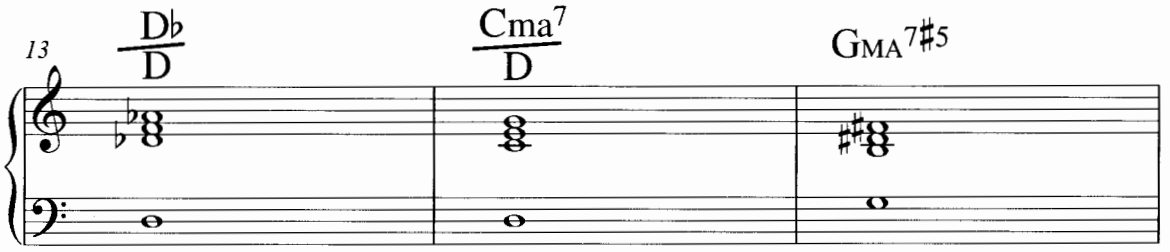


During this first statement of the melody, Wheeler continues to play with duality between melody and harmony. As Example 3.4 shows, the melody that fits with the Abma7#5/G sound clearly delineates G major, while in the following two measures, it outlines E major. So now there are three elements present: the step-wise root motion; harmonic motion of a major third demonstrated in Ab augmented moving to E major; and finally, melodic motion emphasizing progression of a minor third, highlighting the G major and E major tonalities. In this regard, "May Ride" offers another view of the technique presented in "Smatta", in which the melody and harmony are each pointing to different directions to obscure the overall tonal picture.

Moving forward in the A section, the sense of duality is further established in measures 13-16. Although the root motion is hinting at a D tonality with the harmony of Db/D-Cma7/D-Gma7#5 in effect providing a I-I7sus-IV motion, the upper structures of this motion demonstrates major triads descending by semi-tone, which is shown in

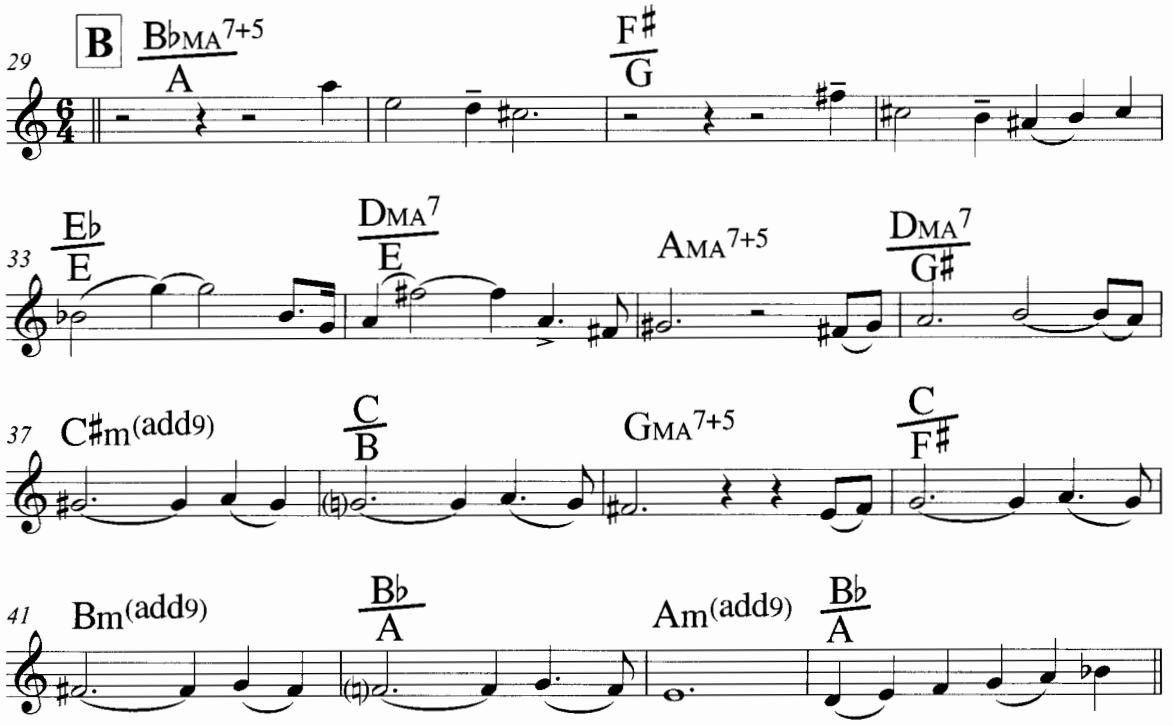
Example 3.5. This element is strongly reinforced by the melody, in particular in measures 13 and 14, which is limited to pitches contained in the upper structure triads. The duality continues in bar 16, where Wheeler uses a Cma7/F# structure to tonicize B minor. In this instance, a V-I root motion is used with a chordal structure of bIIma7 to tonicize B minor. In addition to continuing the duality in Wheeler's harmonic structure, this also reinforces the D tonality established in bar 13, which is then shifting to its relative minor. A Bb/A chord is next used to prepare the new A minor tonality in measure 19, before returning to Bb/A to set up the next solo vamp.

Ex. 3.5. Descending major triads in mm. 13-15 of "May Ride."



Before elaborating on the overall structure of "May Ride", an explanation of how the varying melodic structures function will assist in understanding the layout of the piece as a whole. The A section of the piece is 12 measures long and presents the main theme. The section marked B is the material of letter A with a four bar extension added; it begins transposed up a tone, yet it ends on the same chord as the A section. The B section of "May Ride" is shown in Example 3.6.

Ex. 3.6. "May Ride" B Section.



The B section, beginning a whole tone higher, is an exact transposition of letter A until its tenth bar, measure 39. So how does Wheeler end up in the same place? The shift from the major tonality (now E) to its relative minor in the ninth bar (measure 37) still takes place, and continues to the Phrygian chord a whole step down in the following measure. But instead of landing on Bmadd9 in bar 39, Wheeler instead uses Gma7#5. So at this exact juncture, he's spliced into the form the seventh measure of the A section, and the rest of the B continues in the same format as the A section. The motion of C/B to Gma7#5 in mm. 38-39, where this splice occurs, further develops the duality expressed earlier in the piece. The root motion of a major third has been set up by the harmony in the solo vamp, while the upper structures of these two chords again show major triads descending by semi-tone. So this extension to the second melodic statement, which was

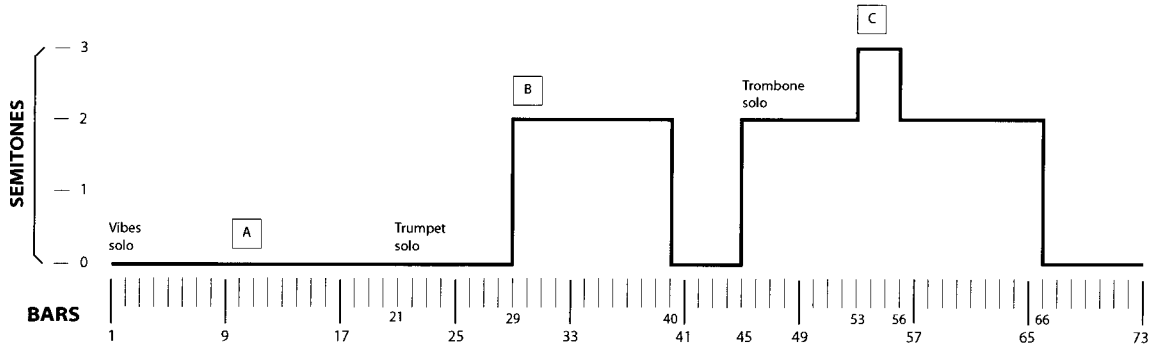
prepared by transposing the first part of the B section, is an elaboration of techniques used earlier in the piece.

The C section, which occurs after the third solo, is again transposed, but in this instance, shifts differently than the other two sections. The first four measures of the C section (mm. 53-56) are transposed a minor third higher from the original setting at letter A. After this, the section is again transposed, as instead of the chord motion of a minor third presented in the A section (E/F moving to Db/D), Wheeler moves down a whole tone. As a result, the following four bars (mm. 57-60) are transposed up a major third from letter A, or whole tone higher than at letter B. The eighth through twelfth measures of the melody, which acted as a transition during letter B, are stated a tone higher, then repeated at pitch, which acts to lengthen this third melodic statement by another four bars. The final section once again finds "May Ride" returning to the Bmadd9, then Bb/A that ends each section of the piece. For the final three measures, Wheeler changes his harmony to an Abma7#11 chord, which acts as bIIma7, before ending the piece on a tonic suspended chord, Gsus. The table shown in Example 3.7 and graph shown in Example 3.8 mark the shifts in the tonal structure of the work.

Ex. 3.7. Layout of "May Ride."

Measures	Arrangement
1-4 (open repeat)	Bass Introduction, Vibraharp Solo
5-8 (repeated)	Melodic Cue to move to letter A
9-20	Letter A – first presentation of melody
21-25 (open repeat)	Trumpet Solo
25-28 (repeated)	Melodic Cue to move to letter B
29-44	Letter B – material of Letter A transposed up a major 2nd, with four-bar extension
45-49 (open repeat)	Trombone Solo, transposed up a major 2nd
51-54 (repeated)	Same Melodic Cue as used earlier, now transposed up a major 2nd
55-end	Letter C – melody with eight bars added, beginning up a minor 3rd from original statement

Ex. 3.8. Graph denoting transposition of sections in "May Ride."



The overall structure of "May Ride" is, to my knowledge, different than anything else in Wheeler's canon. He eschews any structure related to jazz standards, instead creating a form that presents three different solos over the same vamp structure (albeit in two different tonal settings), while binding the solos together with a connecting section that features the melody of the composition. Through the use of transposition and extension, Wheeler creates an arc to "May Ride" that causes the piece to rise until the final statement of the theme, which returns to the G tonality presented at the beginning of the work. It is the use of transposition and extension to this relatively compact structure that creates a fluid arc in the work overall, creating a true sense of journey throughout the various solo and melody sections.

Chapter 4: "W.W."

Wheeler's 1984 quintet release *Double, Double You* (ECM 1262), found him joined by old acquaintances Dave Holland on bass and Jack DeJohnette on drums. It was also the first time English pianist John Taylor appeared on one of Wheeler's recordings, who is a major collaborator in Wheeler's overall body of work, as well as the only appearance of saxophonist Michael Brecker in Wheeler's discography.

The title track from *Double, Double You* demonstrates mode mixture and sequencing in the harmonic movement. "W.W." is a sixteen bar composition that is an exploration in harmonic movement in thirds. In his 1993 Master's thesis "Harmony and Tonality in the Recent Compositions of Kenny Wheeler," David Scott Morgan notes that Wheeler's pieces often contain "harmonic events [that] are clearly defined at the local level, [but] these events do not always correspond to a larger tonal center, resulting in large-scale tonal ambiguity."[20] Morgan establishes three categories of the tonal strategies used by Wheeler on his recording *The Widow in the Window.* The second of Morgan's three categories applies to "W.W.": "a piece with an audible underlying tonal design that cannot be explained by diatonic models…involving a few different key centres of equal importance."[21]

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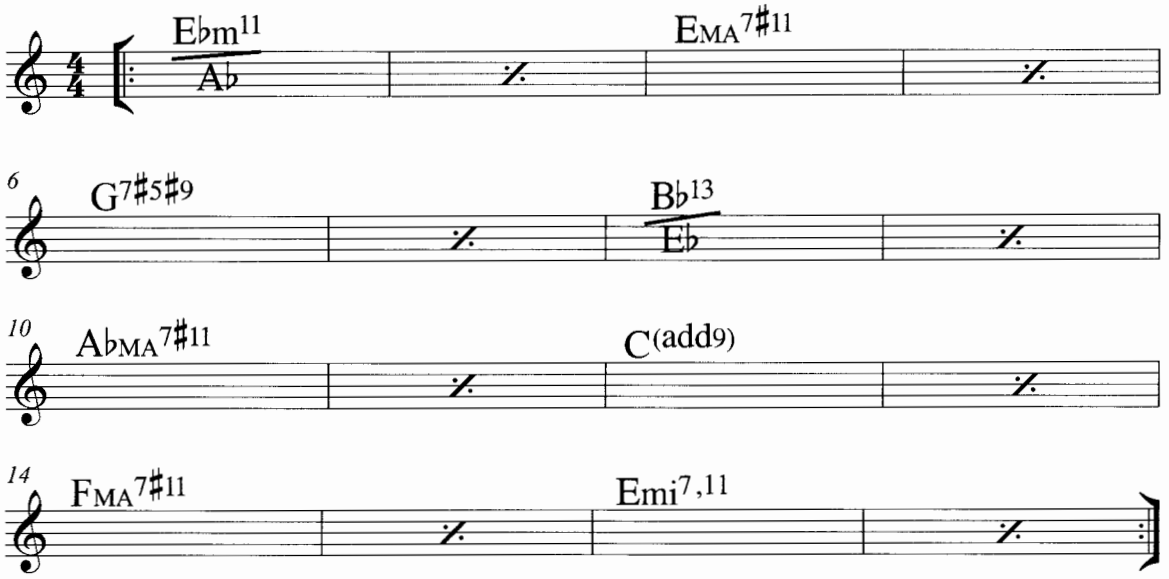
[20] Morgan, "Harmony and Tonality in the Recent Compositions of Kenny Wheeler," 28.
[21] Ibid. The other categories established by Morgan are: 1. pieces in which one key area emerges, if not as the tonic for the entire piece, at least as its most important area; 3. pieces in which a series of temporary tonal stations emerge then disappear, resulting in little sense of tonal heirarchy.

Example 4.1 shows the harmonic progression to "W.W.". The piece begins a semitone lower for the first three choruses, which are all varying presentations of the melody. The fourth statement of the theme finds "W.W." modulating up to the key shown below, where it remains for the duration of the performance. As such, for the purposes of this paper, I will examine the harmony in the key used for the majority of the piece.

Ex. 4.1. Harmonic progression of "W.W."



Before proceeding with analysis, there are two chord symbols in this work that need clarification. The first chord, Ebm11/Ab, is a common way of notating Ab7sus, or Ab mixolydian with a suspended fourth degree. Throughout his body of work, this slash chord is Wheeler's preferred nomenclature for notating this sound. The second slash chord, Bb13/Eb, is far more rare. What Wheeler is specifying with this chord symbol is the use of a shell voicing of Bb13 voiced over an Eb root, which translates to an

Ebma7add11 chord, which corresponds to the Eb Ionian, or major scale. Although atypical, this chord symbol is perfectly logical, since with a conventional Ionian chord, the $4^{th}/11^{th}$ degree cannot be sustained. By writing the V7 chord of Eb (Bb13) and placing it over the tonic, it allows for all the notes of the scale to be used and sustained. I believe that this unusual chord symbol was derived out of necessity. By refusing to notate this chord as an Ebma7, Wheeler did not allow his fellow performers to automatically utilize a standard substitution of a Lydian scale at this point in the progression.

In "W.W.", an overall motion between the tonal areas of Ab to Eb to C to Emi is heard. The table shown in Example 4.2 highlights the chord functions and relationships through the different key areas of "W.W.".

Ex. 4.2. Harmony, Function and Tonal Areas in "W.W."

Measures	Chord	Function	Tonal Area
1-2	Ebm11/Ab	I7sus	Ab
3-4	Ema7#11	bVIma7/bIIma7	Ab/Eb
5-6	G7#5#9	III+7/I+7	Eb
7-8	Ebma7	Ima7	Eb
9-10	Abma7#11	IVma7/bVIma7	Eb/C
11-12	Cadd9	I	C/Emi
13-14	Fma7#11	IVma7/bIIma7	C/Emi
15-16	Emi7,11	Imi7/bVImi7	Emi/Ab

The piece begins with Ebmi11/Ab moving to Ema7#11, which is a chord motion of I7sus to bVIma7. Wheeler uses mode mixture, borrowing from Mixolydian to supply the I chord, and the Aeolian mode for the bVI chord. The next two chords – G7#5#9 to Bb13/Eb – is a case of tonic elaboration. If the upper structure is removed from the G7 chord, at its core is an augmented triad. Since augmented triads divide the octave equally, each of the notes in the chord can function as the root. Therefore, the actual chord progression displays the movement of Eb augmented resolving to Eb major – a case of tension and release on the tonic chord. By instead using a G7#5 chord, Wheeler partially disguises this function; he also reiterates the major third root motion found in the first four bars. As a result, in the first eight measure of "W.W.", the motion from an Ab tonality to Eb is clearly laid out. The Ema7#11 chord, which acts as bVIma7 in Ab, functions as a pivot chord with a secondary role of bIIma7 in the Eb tonality. But this ancillary role of the Ema7#11 chord is obscured in part by the delayed resolution that occurs as a result of the augmented chord placed between it and its destination.

The first eight bars also features a strong sense of E moving to Eb; it is especially apparent in the sequenced root motion, where Ab is the enharmonic major third of E, and G is the third of Eb. This partially disguises Ab7sus as the tonic, while heightening the dual roles of the Ema7 chord.

Moving to the second half of the form, the next chord in the progression is Abma7#11 in bars nine and ten, which functions as a IV chord in the key of Eb. This is the first instance of two chords in the piece having a diatonic relationship, and also marks

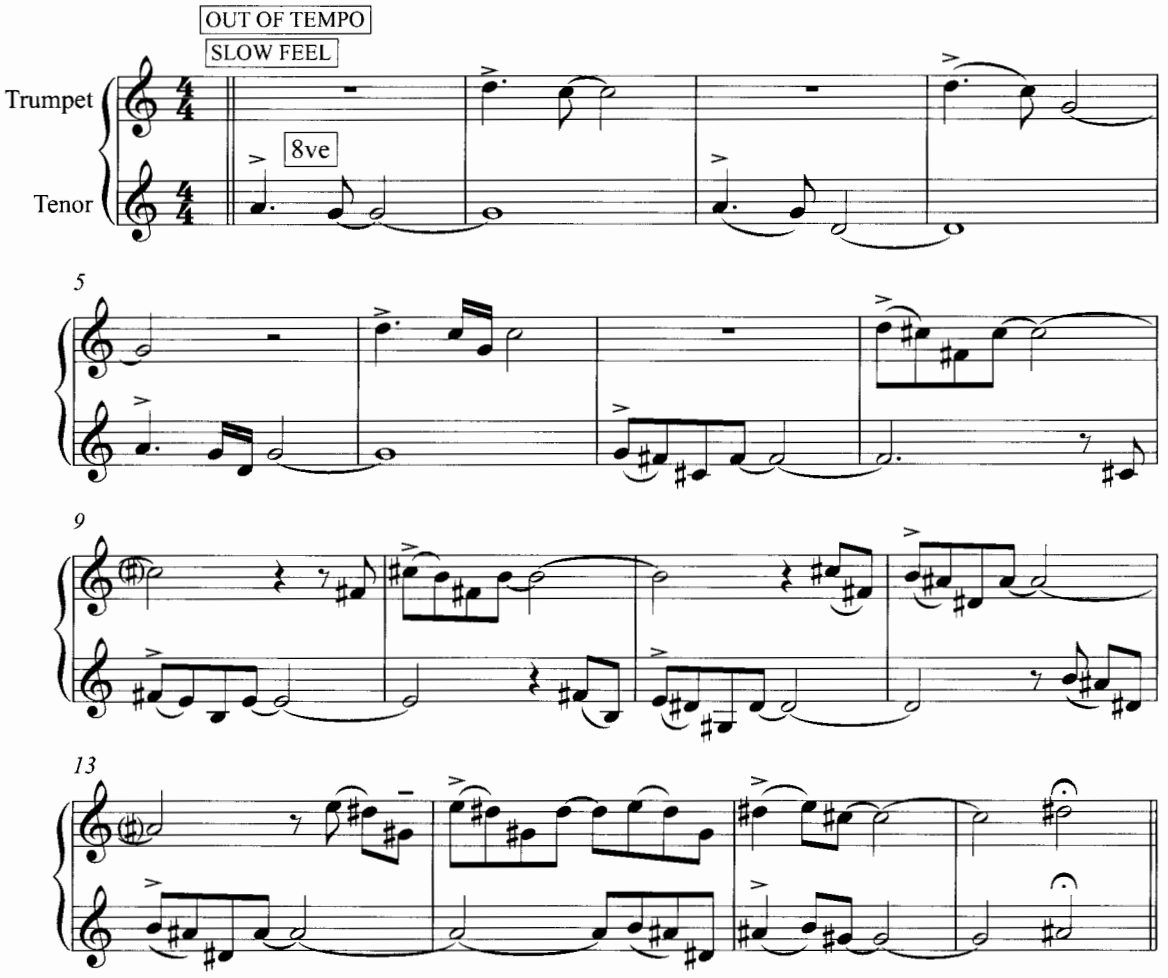
the first time the roots resolve down a perfect fifth. The Ab Lydian chord moves to a Cadd9 chord, providing a subdominant minor resolution with the motion of bVIma7-I, marking the shift to a C tonality. As a result, the Ab chord is functioning as a pivot chord – IV in the key of Eb, and bVI in the key of C. This chord motion is also important as it continues the theme of motion by thirds; however, for the first instance in the piece, it is now ascending. This adds continuity to the harmonic structure while also preparing the final segment of the harmony.

Wheeler continues in a tonal vein by moving to Fma7#11 from the Cadd9 chord. At this point, he has taken the chord movement of I-IV and transposed it from the key of Eb to C, which also continues the theme of motion by thirds, but now on a secondary tonal level. The Fma7#11 chord resolves down by semitone to Emi7,11, providing a strong cadential motion of bIIma7 to Imi, which is strengthened by its placement in the final four bars of the piece. As a result, the Cadd9 chord also has a pivot function, as it acts as bVIma7 leading to bIIma7 to prepare the E minor chord.

Finally, there is the motion from Emi7,11 at the end of the form which leads back to the Ebm11/Ab at the top of the next chorus. This motion of bVIm7-I7sus is a strong cadential movement. The Emi7 chord is really the suspended form of its dominant chord – in this case A7. Therefore, the harmony is moving chromatically from bII7sus-I7sus, but by featuring the E minor chord instead of the A7sus chord, Wheeler disguised this movement while using yet another chord motion in thirds.

The melody of "W.W." utilizes a Wheeler trademark, which is a call and response technique between the main theme and counterline. The counter-melody of "W.W.", shown in Example 4.3, is an almost exact replication of the main theme, transposed down a perfect fourth and displaced by a bar. This continues until the last three eighth notes of bar 14, where the two melodies finally synchronize rhythmically, which adds to the sense of rest at the end of the form, heightening the strength of the harmonic cadence at this point.

Ex. 4.3. "W.W." opening theme.



Another trademark of Wheeler's melodic language on display in "W.W." is the lengthening of the melodic phrases. The piece begins with a two-note idea that is gradually extended, first to three notes, then four, and onward. Wheeler has used this idea to construct melodies in several of his pieces, including part III of "Heyoke" and the opening of the "Sweet Time Suite."

The arrangement of the theme to "W.W." documents an important Wheeler aesthetic. Theme and development are significant elements in composition, and Wheeler uses them to great effect. But he rarely repeats an idea exactly, instead making minute changes to provide a new dimension in the repeated part. The melody to "W.W." is performed four times before solos begin, which is unusual, as in standard jazz practices, a song theme is most often limited to one or two statements. The first presentation of the melody of "W.W." is out of tempo and consists only of the two wind instruments, demonstrating the use of rubato and a duo performance mentioned in the introduction. In this initial announcement, the rhythm of the two instruments is inverted, with the saxophone providing the call and the trumpet the response. The second iteration of the theme remains out of tempo, but finds the rhythmic component of the theme swapped between the two horns. The second melodic statement also adds the rhythm section to the horns with sustained harmonies in the piano and bass and cymbal colours from the drums. The third chorus moves into tempo of a quarter note=176, finding strong propulsion from the rhythm section. The final statement of the melody has the rhythm of the horns united, with the saxophone harmonizing the trumpet a perfect fourth below.

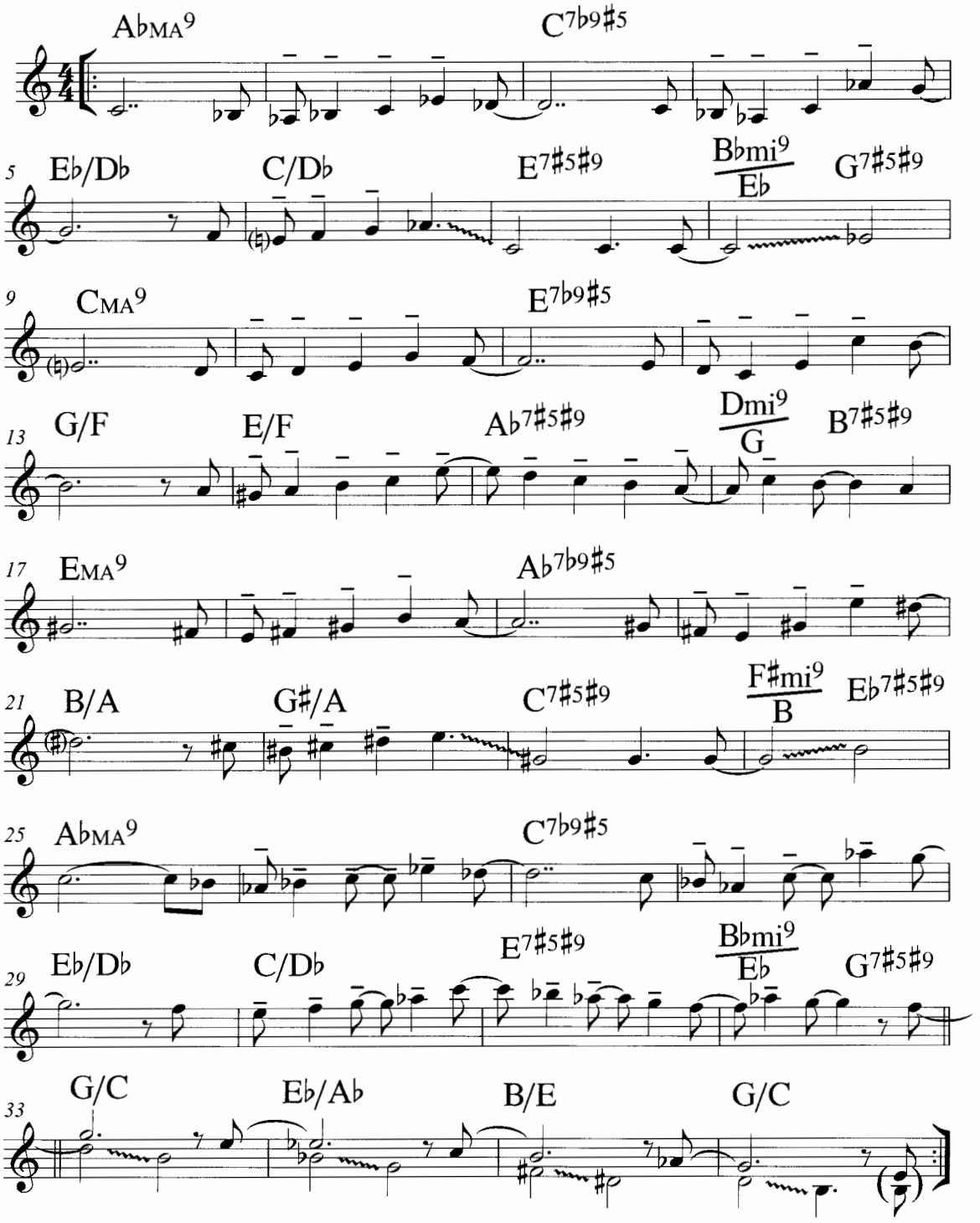
Through the use of ensemble structuring, role change of the wind instruments in a call and response setting, and tempo changes, Wheeler has made each repetition of the melody distinctive, creating the development of "W.W." through the use of basic arranging techniques. A full score of "W.W." is found in appendix 1.

Chapter 5: "Miold Man"

Flutter By, Butterfly (1988) was Wheeler's first recording as leader for the Italian label Soul Note. It features several of his British peers, including pianist John Taylor, saxophonist and flautist Stan Sulzmann, and bassist Dave Holland, as well as American expatriate Billy Elgart on drums.

"Miold Man", the third track from this recording, demonstrates a technique in which Wheeler creates the form of his composition through the construction of a single melodic phrase. In traditional jazz structures such as an AABA or ABAC form, the B (and C, if it exists) section(s) use contrasting melodic and harmonic material to complement the A section of the piece. In the case of "Miold Man", rather than using this idea, Wheeler composes an eight-bar phrase and uses equal division of the octave, transposing the phrase in ascending major thirds, to create development in his composition. It is a technique that Wheeler has used in several compositions, including "Mark Time" from *Double, Double You*, and "Unti" from *Angel Song*. The leadsheet to "Miold Man" is shown in Example 5.1.

Ex. 5.1. “Miold Man.”



Morgan refers to the construction of "Miold Man" as "a series of structurally identical eight-bar phrases which are a major third higher at each repetition" that also contains an extension to the final phrase that "summarizes the harmonic motion of the entire piece."[22] The main phrase for "Miold Man" is very diatonic, which is fairly rare for Wheeler, but in this instance, the diatonicism is what gives strength to the construction of the song. The first phrase is in Ab major and borrows a harmonic progression from standard jazz repertoire: I – III+7 – IV chord motion is used in "Someday My Prince Will Come" and "On A Slow Boat to China", among other pieces.

The harmonic motion of this phrase is slightly disguised by Wheeler's chord symbols for the IV chord: Eb/ Db and C/Db respectively. The chord symbol Eb/Db does not refer to a dominant 7^{th} chord in its third inversion, but rather a voicing of the IV chord that highlights its upper structure: Eb, G, and Bb being the 9^{th}, $\#11^{th}$ and 13^{th}, respectively. In an effort to somewhat obscure this standard chord motion, Wheeler uses nomenclature that omits the third, fifth and seventh of this chord. But if we look deeper, the chord scale that accompanies Eb7 (V) in the key of Ab would be Mixolyian, the fifth mode of Ab. Both Eb Mixolydian and Db Lydian are diatonic modes of Ab. So even though the voicing specifies the upper structure of the Db chord, the scale that corresponds to this chord is still Lydian, the standard sound of a IV chord in major. The C/Db chord is the same as discussed in "May Ride"; this time it establishes the ma7#9#11 sound.

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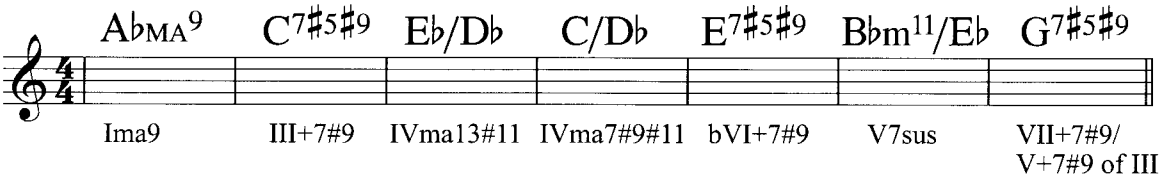
[22] Ibid., 26.

Unlike the two jazz standards mentioned above, which use the IV chord to lead to new destinations in the B section, Wheeler continues to establish the sound of Ab tonality by using E7#5#9, a secondary dominant chord whose function is bII7 of V, to lead to a suspended dominant chord (Bbm11/Eb, or Eb13sus). The final chord of the phrase is G7#5#9, an altered dominant chord that leads strongly to the new C major tonality of the next eight bars. But this V-I function is weakened in two ways: first by the short duration of only two beats; secondly, by the fact that it has a pivot function. G7alt is the seventh mode of Ab melodic minor. Therefore, if we consider the use of the G7alt chord as a case of mode mixture, which is an established element in Wheeler's harmonic language, this final chord is both reinforcing the sound of the Ab tonality as well as preparing the modulation.

Ex. 5.3. Roman Numeral Analysis of the first eight bars of "Miold Man."

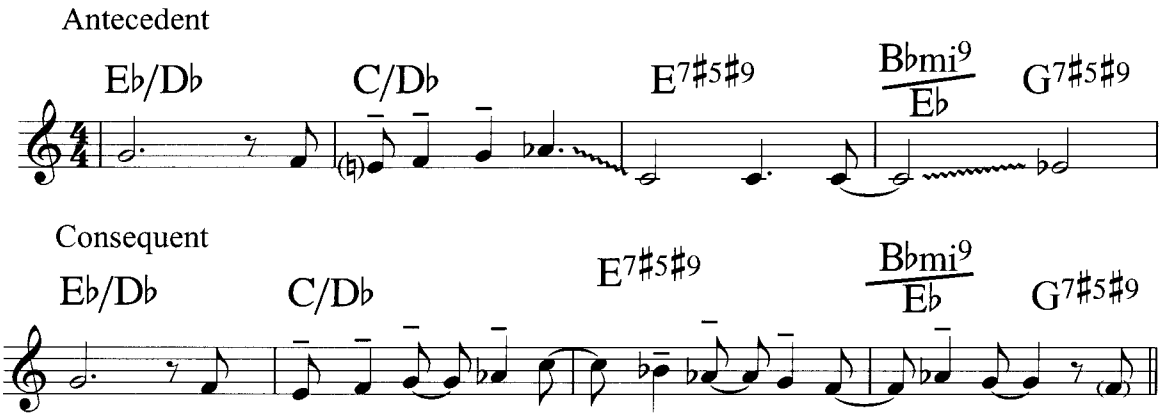


Melodically, the first eight bars are almost exclusively in Ab major. The only exception, an E natural at the beginning of bar 6, is simply a chromatic lower neighbour tone to the F natural. Wheeler changes from the Eb/Db in bar 5 to the C/Db chord in order to support this melody note.

The second eight-bar phrase is virtually identical to the first, but now transposed to C major. The only change is a development of the melody beginning at the end of bar

14 and carrying on through the end of bar 16, which results in an antecedent and consequent structure to the second halves of these eight-bar phrases. These antecedent and consequent endings are shown in Example 5.4 in the key of Ab.

Example 5.4. Antecedent and Consequence Phrase Endings in "Miold Man."



Wheeler continues the upward motion in thirds, moving to the key of E in bars 17-24 with an exact transposition of the original phrase, then returns to Ab with an exact transposition of bars 9-16 (originally in C major). A four-bar extension is added to the final phrase, with a set of major 9 chords moving down in major thirds – G/C, Eb/Ab, B/E, G/C. This extension serves three purposes: first of all, as Morgan mentions, it summarizes what has happened in the piece earlier by utilising harmonic motion moving in major thirds, applying it now to single measures rather than eight-bar phrases. Secondly, it allows Wheeler to return to his original key of Ab. In this piece, Wheeler is applying a three-part division of the octave to four eight-bar phrases. Therefore, if he had not put an extension at this junction, the logical harmonic motion would be to continue to C major, not allowing the piece to end. Most importantly, though, this four-bar extension serves as a release. The energy created by the constant upward motion of the piece (on a

small scale, the chord progression of I-III-IV-bVI-V-VII demonstrates an almost continuous ascent; on a large scale, each eight-bar phrase moves up by a major third) is relieved by the last four bars of the composition, when both the melody and harmony descend.

In addition to the distinct structure of this piece, an important compositional consideration is Wheeler's use of open improvisation within a form. Wheeler has had a long history with open improvisation, beginning in the 1960s, but what is different with his work is how he uses it to complement closed form structures. Wheeler remarked to Gene Lees that he felt that playing "free jazz helped loosen [him] up on [chord] changes, and [playing chord changes] brought [his] free jazz in a bit, where it was more controlled."[23]

"Miold Man" begins with Dave Holland performing a free bass introduction that eventually moves into tempo and subsequently into the first statement of the melody. A free improvisation section is also inserted as a second solo format – after trumpet and piano solo over the form of the piece, the saxophone enters to solo, which morphs into a free duet with the drums. The saxophone and drum duet eventually moves out of tempo and finally sets up the return to the theme.

The addition of the free improvisation section in "Miold Man" is important, as it shows Wheeler uniting two different improvisational styles. The eight bar phrase structures and antecedent and consequent melodic phrases give "Miold Man" a standard

[23] Lees, "Come Back Last Summer: Kenny Wheeler," 32.

ABAC structure. The diatonicism of each phrase reinforces the standard sound of this piece. But Wheeler breaks away from this association by not having all improvisations take place over the song form, and in doing so, he reconciles the two distinct elements of his improvisational voice.

"Miold Man" demonstrates Wheeler maturing as an artist and composer. The standard structure shows him accepting standard elements from the jazz canon, recognizing that each composition does not need to be completely new, yet still finding a way to let his artistic voice speak out.

Chapter 6: "Nicolette"

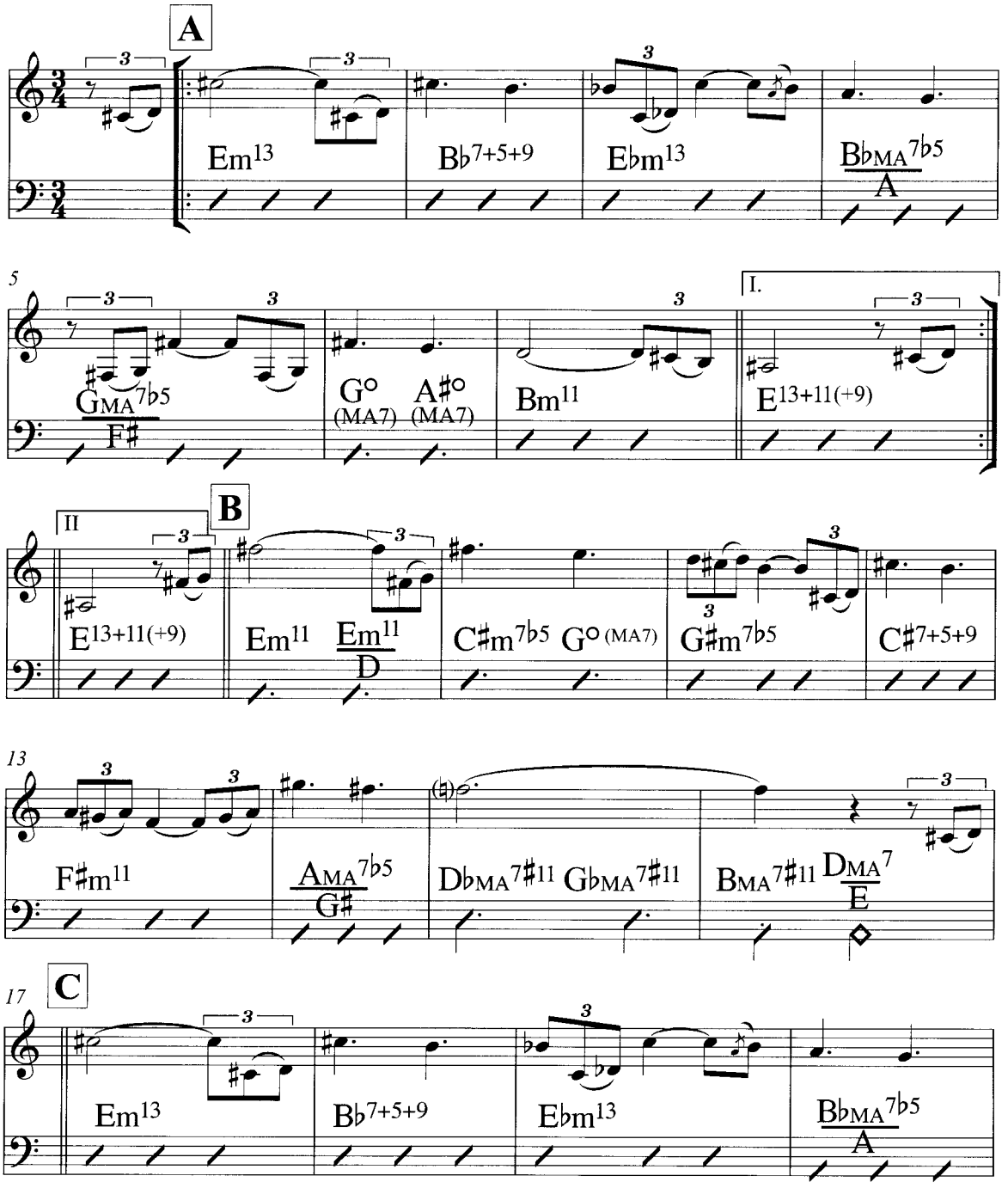
Wheeler's 1997 quartet release *Angel Song* (ECM 1607) is an important work in his discography. It is his first recording in a drummer-less ensemble, a trend that he continued for several consequent albums. John Fordham calls *Angel Song* the "high point" of Wheeler's recorded output, describing it as "a four-way jazz conversation without drums…featuring Cool School guru Lee Konitz on alto, an irresistibly powerful Dave Holland on bass, and Bill Frisell's empathetic guitar playing."[24]

"Nicolette", the opening track from *Angel Song*, is another example of Wheeler using standard materials in his compositions, as it is constructed with an AABA' songform. It also demonstrates Wheeler crafting a piece from essentially a single melodic cell.

The leadsheet of "Nicolette" is shown in Example 6.1.

[24] Fordham, "ECM and European Jazz," 15.

Ex. 6.1. "Nicolette" leadsheet.



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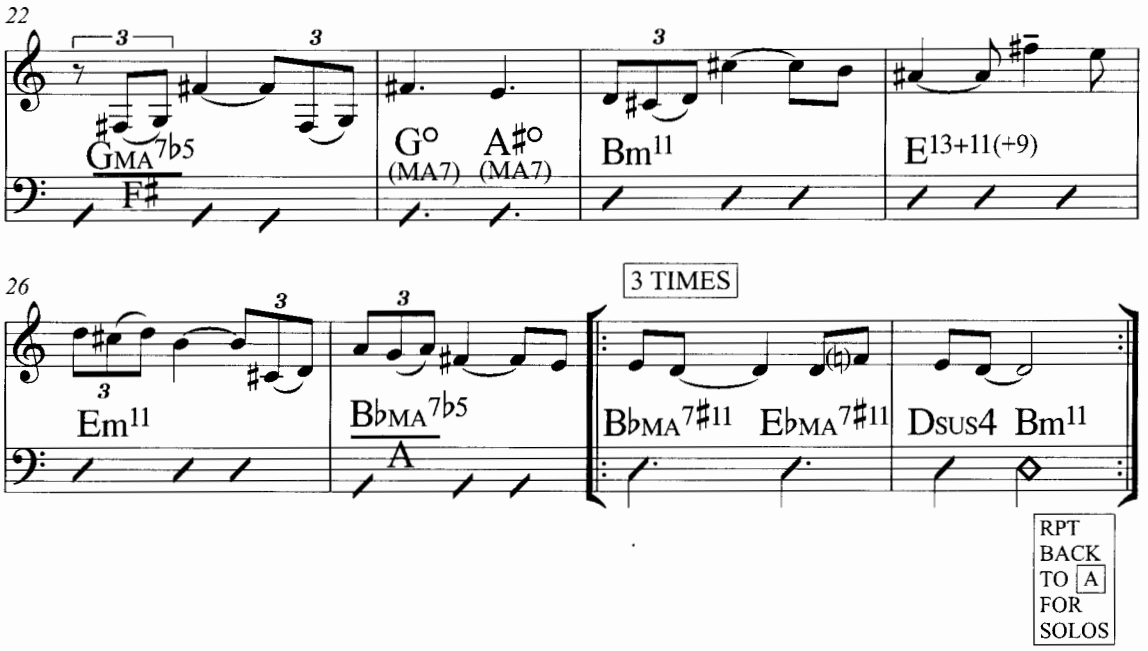
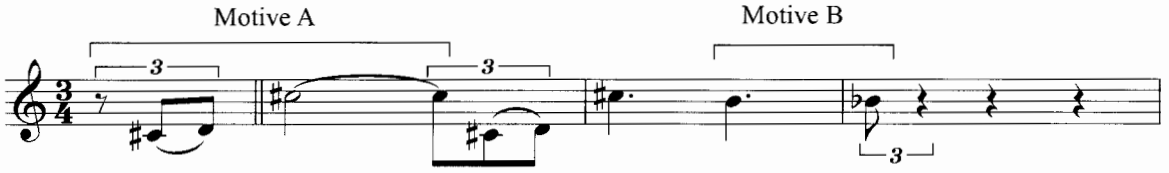


Example 6.2 shows the two main elements of the theme to "Nicolette". Motive A is a three-note grouping comprised of an ascent by minor second followed by an ascent of a major seventh. This is the main melodic component of the piece. Motive B is the connecting material that binds differing iterations of Motive A, and moves in descending step-wise motion.

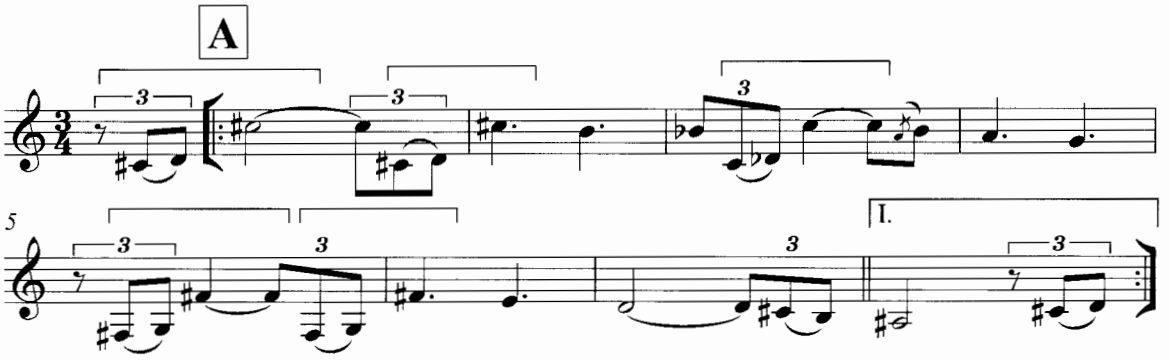
Ex. 6.2. Main motives of "Nicolette."



As shown in Example 6.3, Motive A first appears as the melodic pick-up to the piece. The pitches C#-D-C# are part of the upper structure of the Emi13 chord, being the

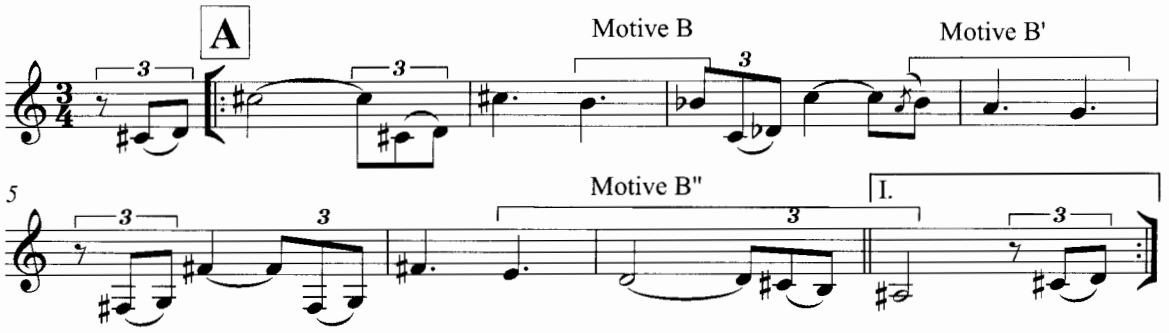
sixth, flat seventh and thirteenth, respectively. Motive A is then reiterated a semi-tone lower to fit the Ebmi13 chord in bar 3. It is then transposed down a perfect fifth from its original setting for its third statement, with the notes F#-G-F# now appearing as the root, flat ninth and octave of the F# Phrygian chord. The third statement of Motive A is also displaced rhythmically, with the triplet part of the figure forming a pickup to beat two, rather than beat one in its original setting.

Ex. 6.3. "Nicolette" A section. Motive A shown in brackets.



It is the evolution of Motive B that creates much of the melodic development in the piece. The first exposure to the secondary motive comes in bar 2. Since the C# that begins this bar is the completion of Motive A, Motive B begins as a two-note cell on the second half of beat two with the statement of the pitch B and continues with the first Bb of bar 3. The second occurrence of Motive B begins on the last eighth note of bar three, and now contains three pitches – Bb, A, and G, which I've labeled as B'. The final instance sees this motive developed into a five-note cell that finishes the phrase – E, D, C#, B, A#, designated as B". Wheeler took this simple step-wise connecting idea and augmented it each time, successively lengthening it to develop his melodic structure. The three variations of Motive B are shown in Example 6.4.

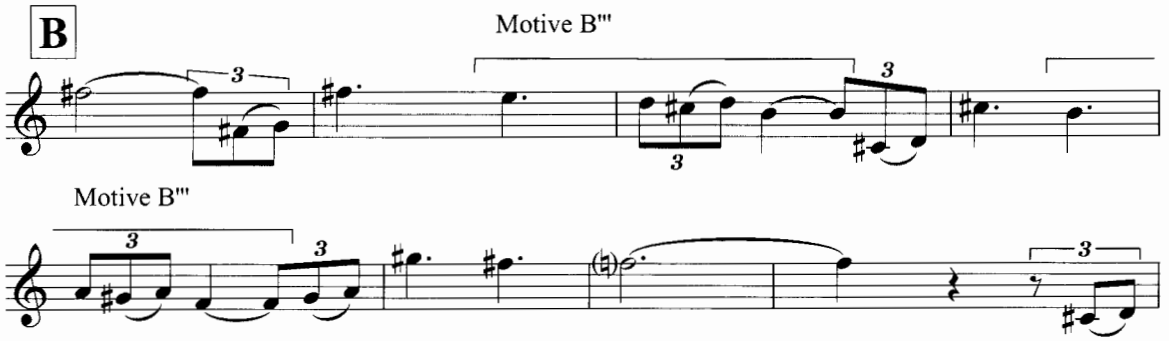
Ex. 6.4. Variations of Motive B.



The bridge section of "Nicolette" begins with Motive A, now transposed up a perfect fourth from its original statement, with the notes F#-G-F# representing the second, minor third, and ninth of the Emi9 chord that begins this section of the piece. This is unusual, as the role of the bridge in AABA structures is to use new melodic and harmonic material in order to complement the A section. It is uncommon for a bridge section to begin on the same sound that is used at the beginning of the A section. Yet Wheeler repeats the tonic Emi chord to start the bridge, and uses the transposition of the melody to signal the arrival of the new section in the piece. The third bar of the bridge finds a new melodic cell – a triplet introduction to another statement of Motive A. But in actuality, what appears to be a new melodic idea is a modification of Motive B. The triplet to quarter note figure that begins this bar (D-C#-D-B) can be reduced: if the final note of the triplet, which is a repetition of the first note, is removed, we see the same descending step-wise motion Wheeler used in Motive B. By changing the rhythm into an eighth-note triplet and altering the shape of the line by repeating the pitch D, Wheeler has combined the rhythmic element of Motive A with the melodic shape of Motive B, creating a third idea that lends support to the structure while also providing a contrasting

element to the bridge. This idea, which I've labeled as B''', also appears in the fifth bar of the bridge, and is shown in Example 6.5.

Ex. 6.5. Motive B''' in B section of "Nicolette."



Ex. 6.6. Reduction of first statement of Motive B'''.

The final A section of "Nicolette" is a repetition of the first with an eight bar extension added. The melody of this extension is an encapsulation of the piece as a whole, with the first two bars repeating the new melodic fragment presented in the third and fifth bars of the bridge, while the next two bars, which are repeated three times, feature the downward step-wise motion of Motive B.

The harmonic plan of "Nicolette" is fairly straightforward, with the majority of the piece being in E minor with some brief motion to other tonal areas. However, there are some distinctive elements to the harmony that require scrutiny.

The first element of the harmonic scheme that is somewhat unusual is the lack of a typical turnaround. In pieces from standard jazz repertoire, the turnaround is a common chord sequence "found at the end of phrases or sections…[that] lead into the following phrase."[25] Although turnarounds are not used in contemporary composition in the same way as in standard jazz material, composers are nevertheless highly aware of their harmonic choices used at the ends of phrases to fulfill this role of setting up the next phrase. Wheeler has used a pair of somewhat unusual chords to return to the Emi chord at the top of each section.

The final chord of the A section is E13#9#11, which corresponds to a half-whole diminished scale. This dominant diminished chord is used to lead back to the Emi13 chord at the beginning of the second A section, as well as to the Emi9 chord that begins the bridge. The use of a diminished chord that is built on the same root as the chord it is resolving to is a twist on a standard harmonic device. Most often, this idea is used in major keys, where a diminished seventh chord (which corresponds to a whole-half diminished scale) is placed between the dominant and tonic chords. This creates a tonic elaboration, where one hears the root motion resolve down a perfect fifth, but not the expected resolution in the interior voices. In this case, Wheeler highlights the symmetry of the dominant seventh diminished sound and uses the resolution of the interior voices of this chord, to subtly lead back to E minor.

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[25] Richard Ferland, *Jazz Harmony: A Didactic Approach*, trans. Joe Sullivan (Montréal: Centre Collégial de Développement de Matériel Didactique, 2013), 145.

Having established the sound of the dominant diminished chord at the end of both A sections to lead back to the tonic, Wheeler closes the bridge with an E7 suspended chord (shown in bar 8 of Example 6.5). With the use of this chord progression, he's playing with the setting of the piece. By already using E13#9#11 to resolve to Emi in the first two A's, Wheeler gradually acclimatizes the listener's ear to this sound. Through the use of the suspended dominant instead of the diminished dominant structure, he further softens the sound, and makes an even more subdued return to the tonic. The voice leading in this progression is made clear by the symbol Wheeler uses to notate the suspended chord: Dma7/E. He is really using a common modal cadence of bVIIma7-Imi, but by placing the bVIIma7 chord (Dma7) over E, Wheeler hides its basic function while also contributing to the continuity of the overall composition. It is a very subtle motion, but it still creates enough movement to prepare the Emi chord at the start of the final A section.

Another interesting harmonic device in "Nicolette" is the use of two Phrygian chords a minor third apart in bars four and five of the A section: Bbma7b5/A and Gma7b5/F# respectively. This isn't a short bout of modality in an otherwise tonal piece. In this instance, he uses the Phrygian sound in a tonal manner as a suspended dominant chord with altered extensions; what's really taking place is A7b9sus moving to F#7b9sus. Wheeler began the piece with a harmonic sequence: a tonic minor chord followed by a dominant seventh chord whose root is a tritone away. This continues until bar 5, which makes the A7b9sus (Bbma7b5/A) chord in measure four a part of the opening sequence that ends in a deceptive cadence when it moves to Gma7b5/F# instead of the expected D minor. The Gma7b5/F# chord in bar five is used to initiate a tonicization of Bmi7 (Vmi7)

in bar seven. In bar six, he uses two diminished chords – Gdim and A#dim – a minor third apart. Since the diminished chord is constructed from minor thirds, these two chords are the same chord built off of different roots. Wheeler clearly understands this, but he chose to write the two different chords because he wanted that specific root motion to occur. He increases the harmonic rhythm at this part of the phrase to create drive towards the end of the eight-bar phrase. The A#dim chord is the secondary dominant of the Bmin7 chord that happens in bar seven, so what's happening is a disguised II-V progression, where the F#7b9sus is the IImi7b5 of B minor structured over the fifth, while the diminished chords provide the dominant function motion towards B minor.

Like "Miold Man" before it, "Nicolette" also displays maturation in Wheeler's compositional voice. It shows Wheeler utilizing another standard song form and a highly motivic melody. But through the use of unusual harmonic choices that perform the role of a turnaround, and the transposition of melodic materials, he has again allowed his artistic voice to come out clearly.

Conclusion

The six works examined in this paper have demonstrated the compositional devices used by Wheeler. His work utilizes mode mixture to expand the realms of tonality, non-functional harmonic progressions, melodic composition through intervallic sequence, metric changes within a song form, and structural variation.

As a performer, each compositional element provides challenges in the preparation of Wheeler's work. On a technical level, a complete understanding of all the modes of major, melodic minor and harmonic minor scales, and how they function in different settings, is demanded. Additionally, some of the nomenclature in Wheeler's harmony, particularly certain slash chords, requires deciphering. A good example is the E/F sound: found in "May Ride", it acts as a mixed modal flavor of F minor, while in "Miold Man" (now C/Db), it represents a Dbma7#9#11 sound. Rhythmically, the ability to shift between different metres, and in the case of "Smatta", within an odd phrase structure, requires much practice. Additionally, the ability to melodically navigate Wheeler's compositions is a challenge. Wheeler has a highly developed melodic and harmonic language, and the ability to improvise melodies that link non-functional chord motion, such as in "W.W.", or the uncommon slash chords found in the solo vamp of "May Ride," also requires a great deal of practice.

Beyond the considerable technical requirements that are essential to perform these works convincingly, an understanding of the aesthetic behind the ECM sound as well as

Wheeler's individual musical voice is needed. Spaciousness is an important theme in Wheeler's work. It can be found in the textures of his ensembles, which often break into smaller components, as well as in the frequent use of rubato that provides a release from steady tempo, and allows for musical ideas to breathe. Perhaps my greatest challenge as a performer, one that I am still striving to improve, is the use of space as an improviser. As mentioned in the introduction, it was the use of space, in the form of stopping and listening, that was the first step for Garbarek in finding his personal voice. When examining the recordings of the pieces discussed in this paper, I was struck by the manner in which van der Geld slowly develops his improvisation at the beginning of "May Ride". It displays a sense of maturity; a desire to draw the listener into the music by making each statement concise, musical and of significance, as well as patience to allow each phrase to resonate. For the same reason, I was also drawn to Jarrett's solo on "Smatta". It was essential to consider this sense of pacing in the performance of these works with my own group, and this aesthetic was consciously heeded as an additional point of reference in addition to the basic musical information provided by the score.

Most importantly, when performing Wheeler's works, is the requirement of the musician to approach it with his or her own musical voice. It is my hope that this paper has shown, through my analysis of Wheeler's compositions, just how vital an original voice is in jazz improvisation. This is reinforced by Wheeler's choice of sidemen on his recordings; each one has a highly idiosyncratic musical personality that was stamped on his performance of each song. As I stated in the introduction, it is the goal of every jazz

musician to develop an individual voice, and the performance of Wheeler's music, with all its unique qualities, should aid in developing this essential element.

To paraphrase Morgan, the music of Kenny Wheeler suggests many possibilities for further development, both of contemporary jazz composition and performance.[26] There remains a great amount of his work that has yet to be investigated. It is my sincere hope that this paper serves to inspire others to further explore the music of this important artist.

[26] Morgan, "Harmony and Tonality in the Recent Compositions of Kenny Wheeler," 129.

Appendix 1

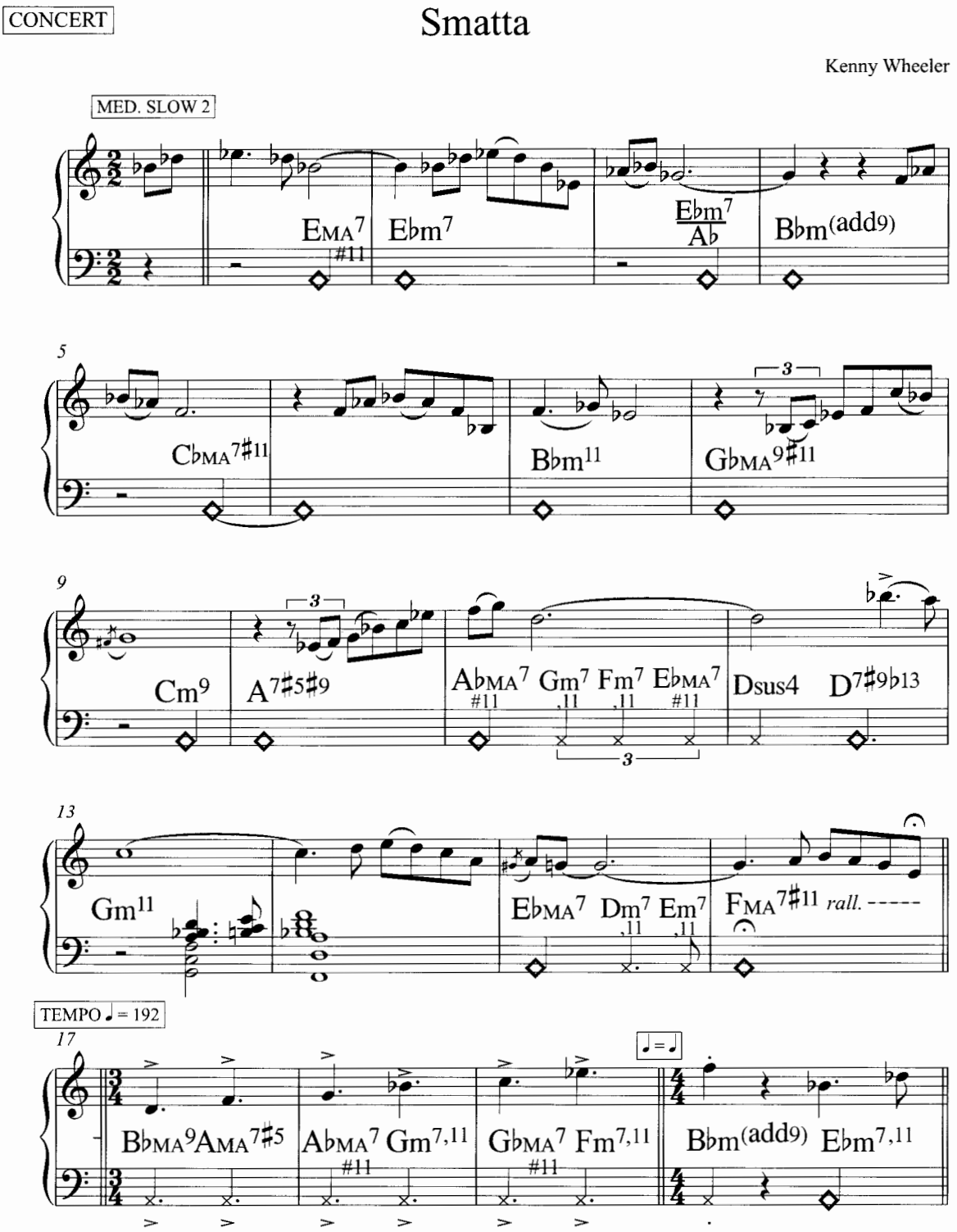
Scores

"Smatta"

"May Ride"

"W.W."

Figure 1. "Smatta."



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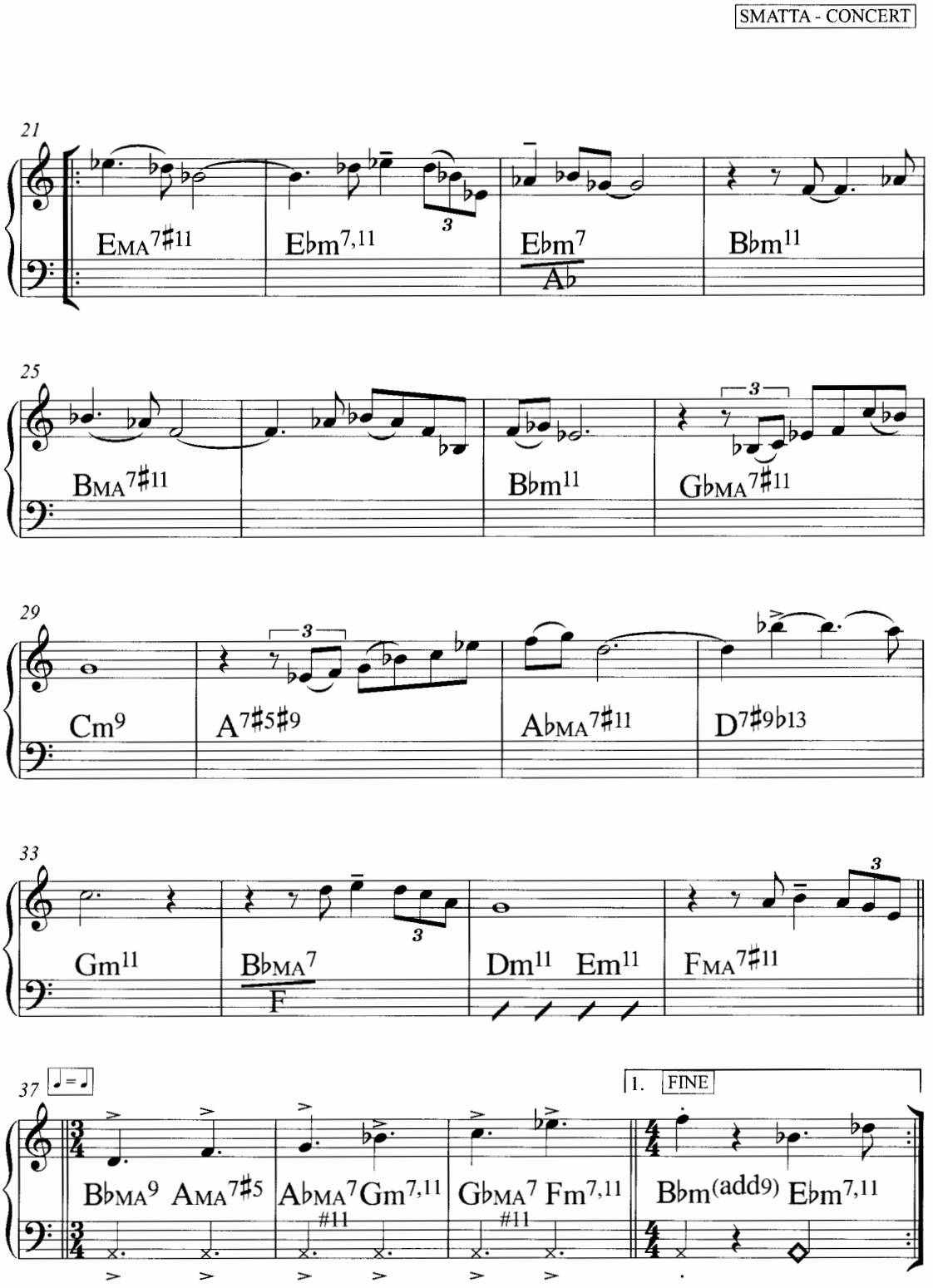

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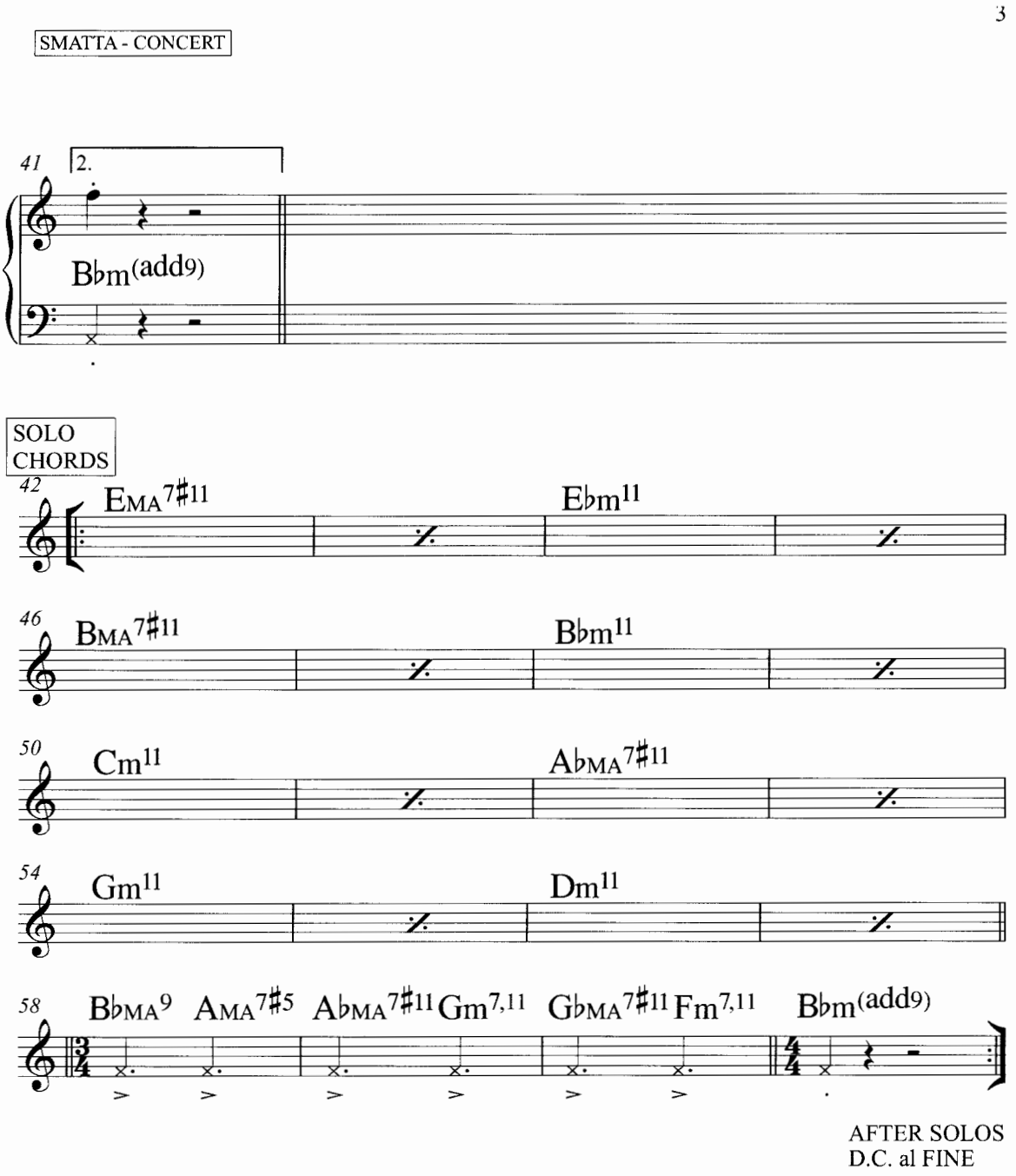
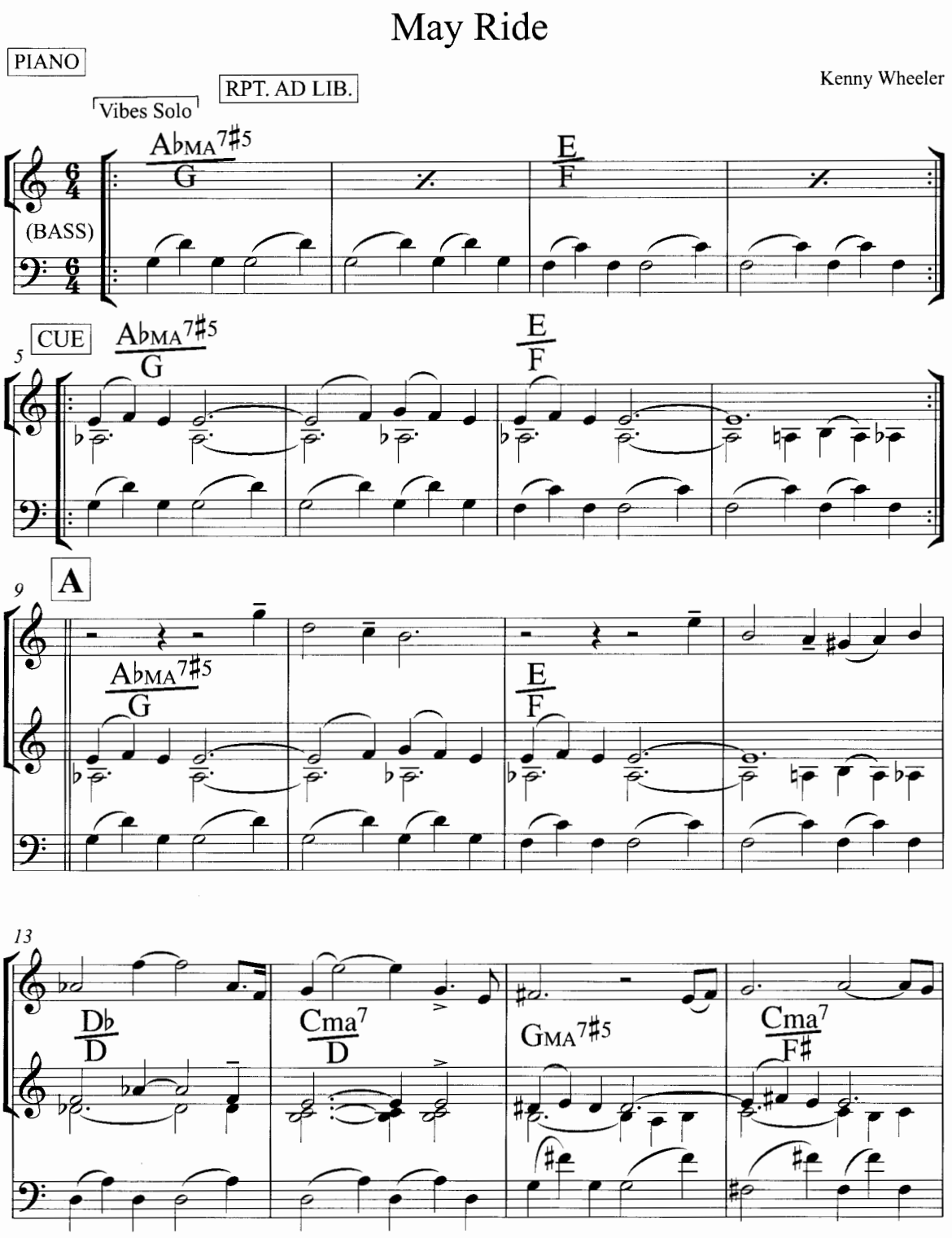


Figure 2. "May Ride."



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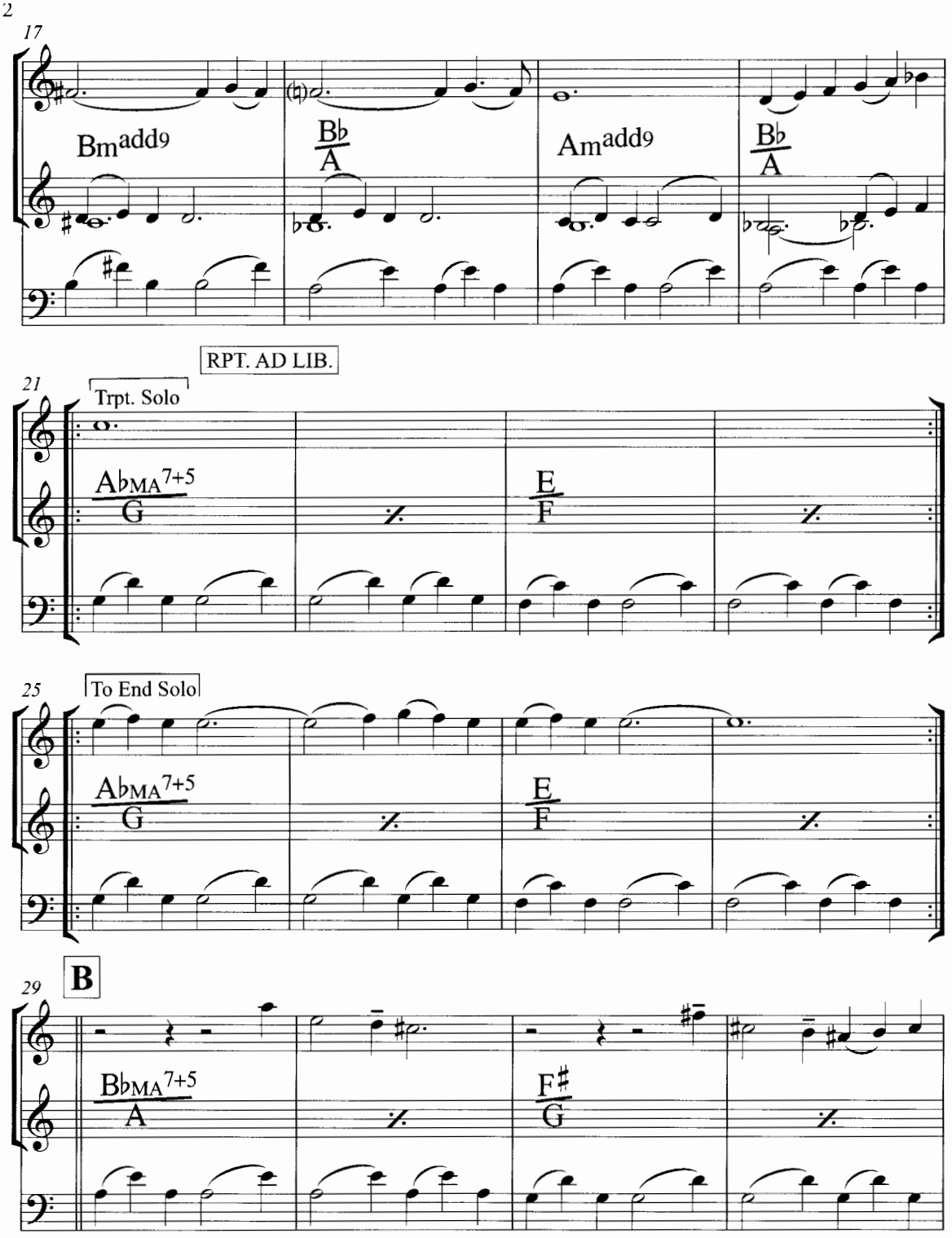

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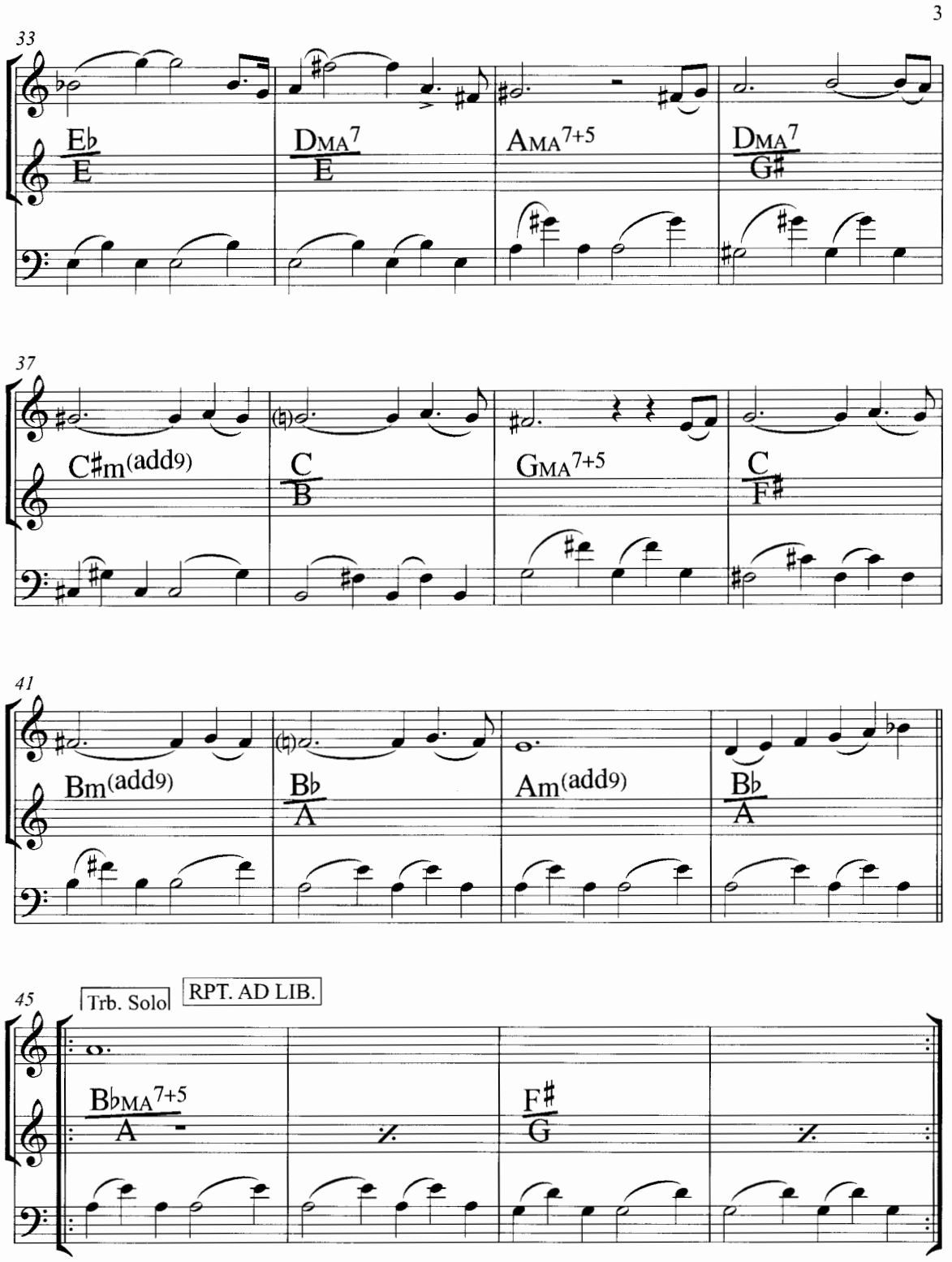

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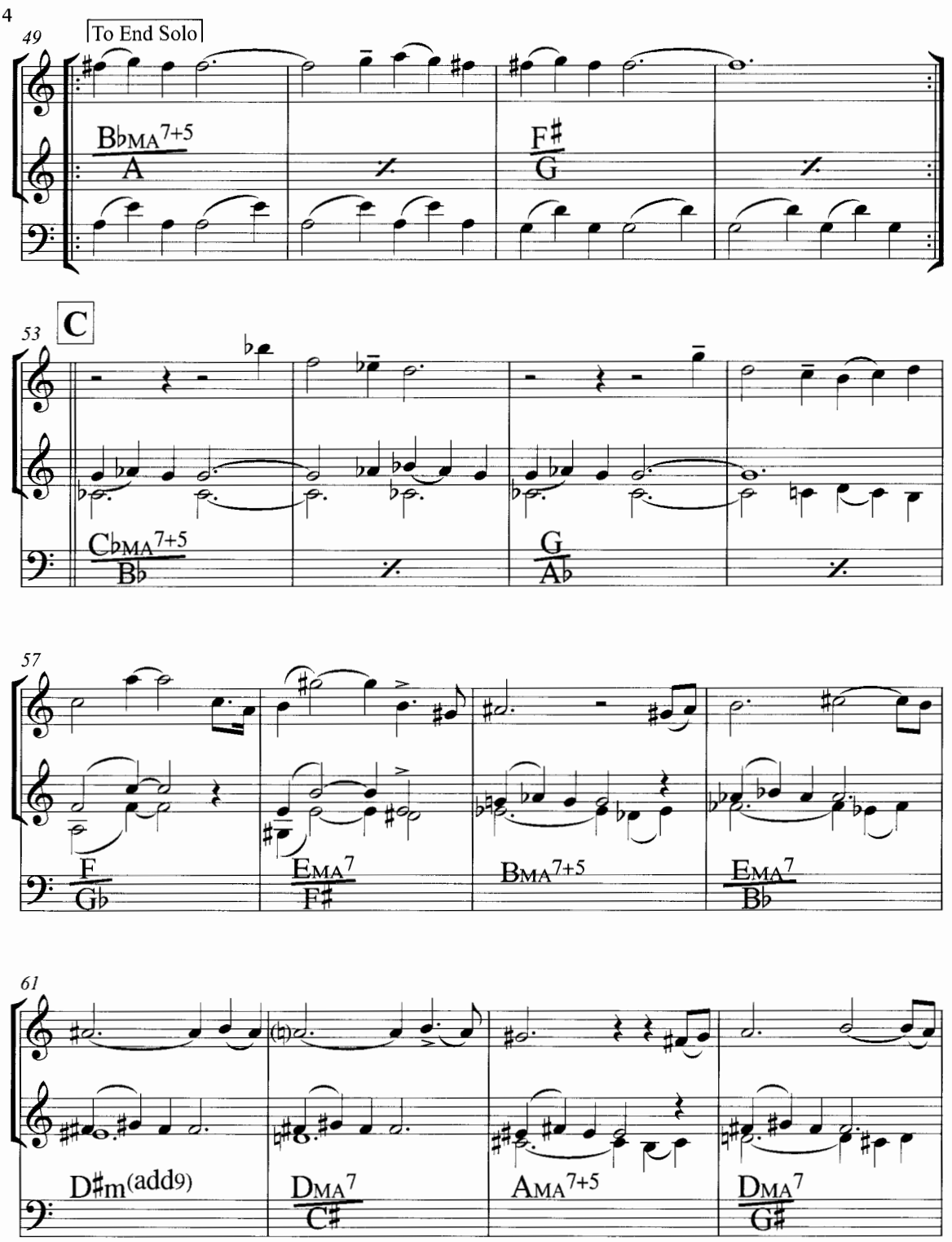

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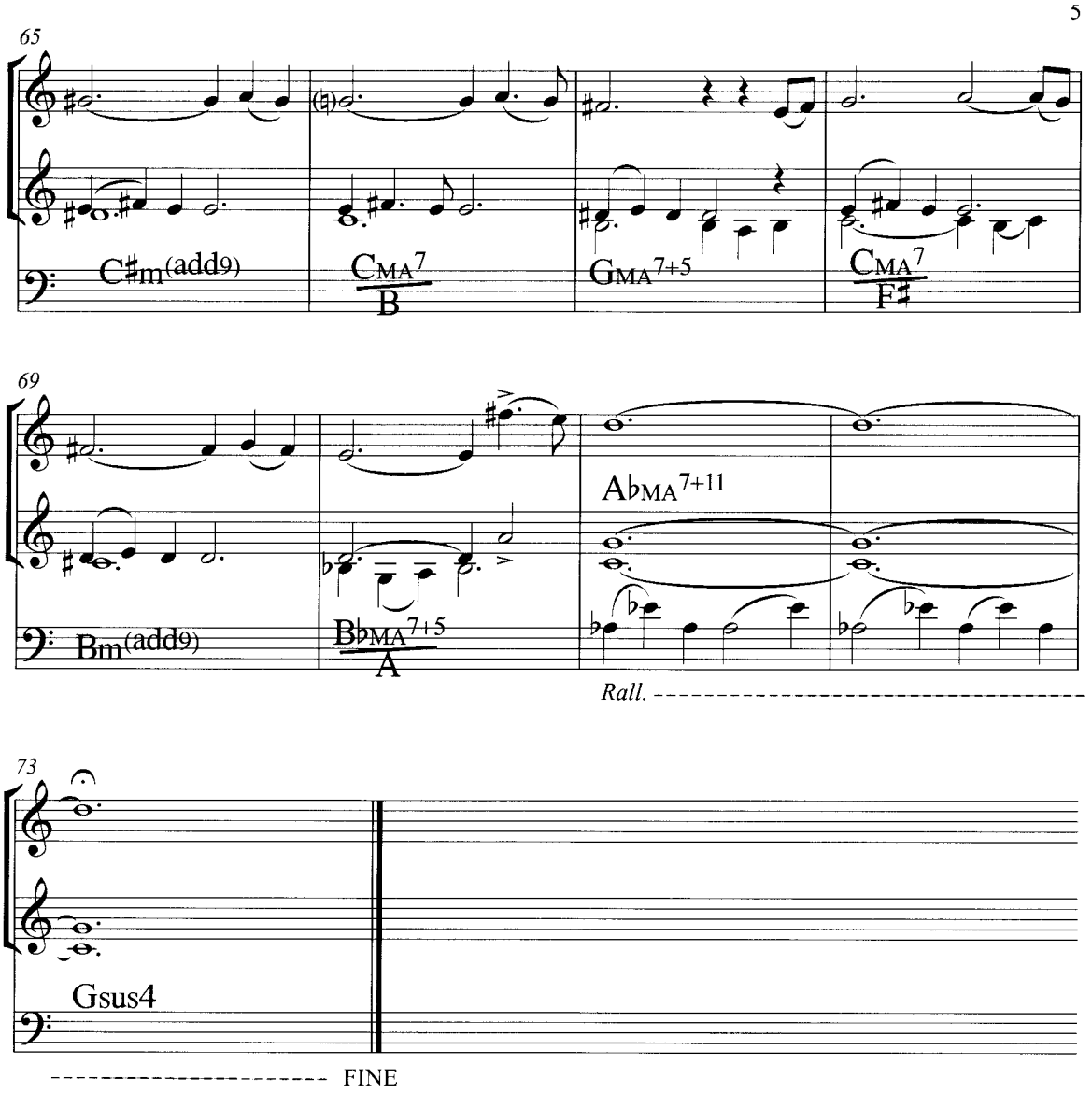


Figure 3. "W.W."

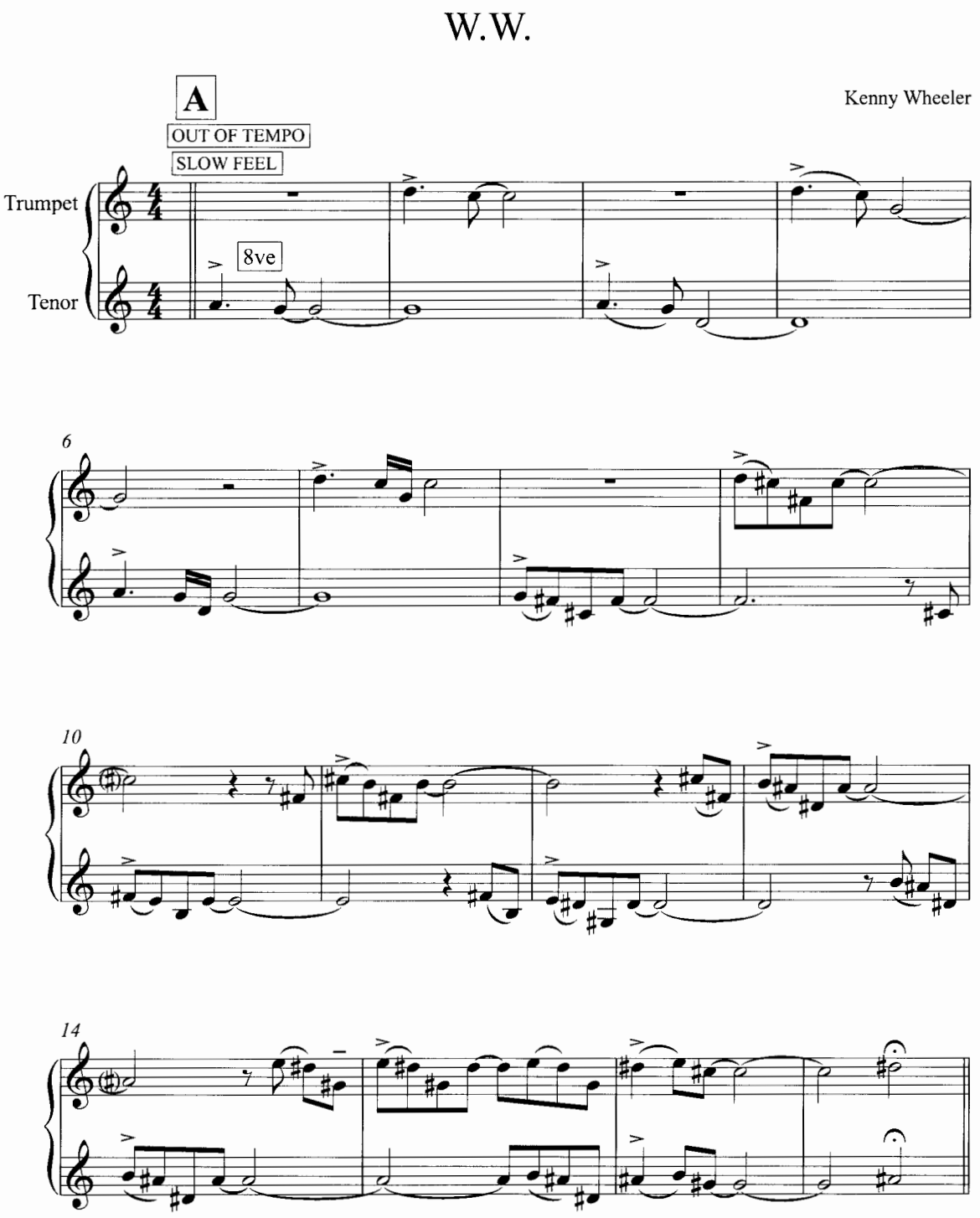
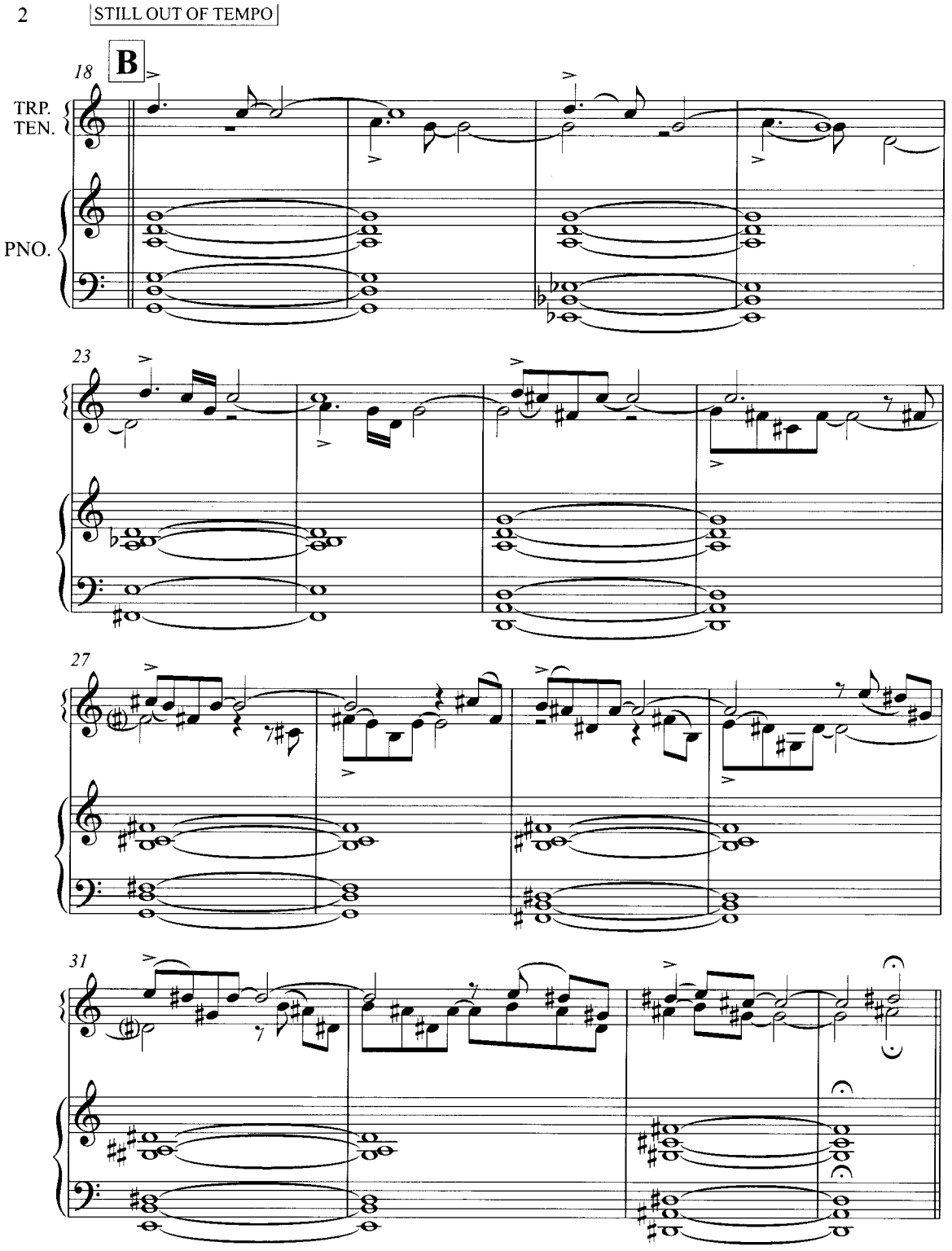

W.W.
A
OUT OF TEMPO
SLOW FEEL
Kenny Wheeler
Trumpet
Tenor
8ve
6
10
14

Figure 3, continued.



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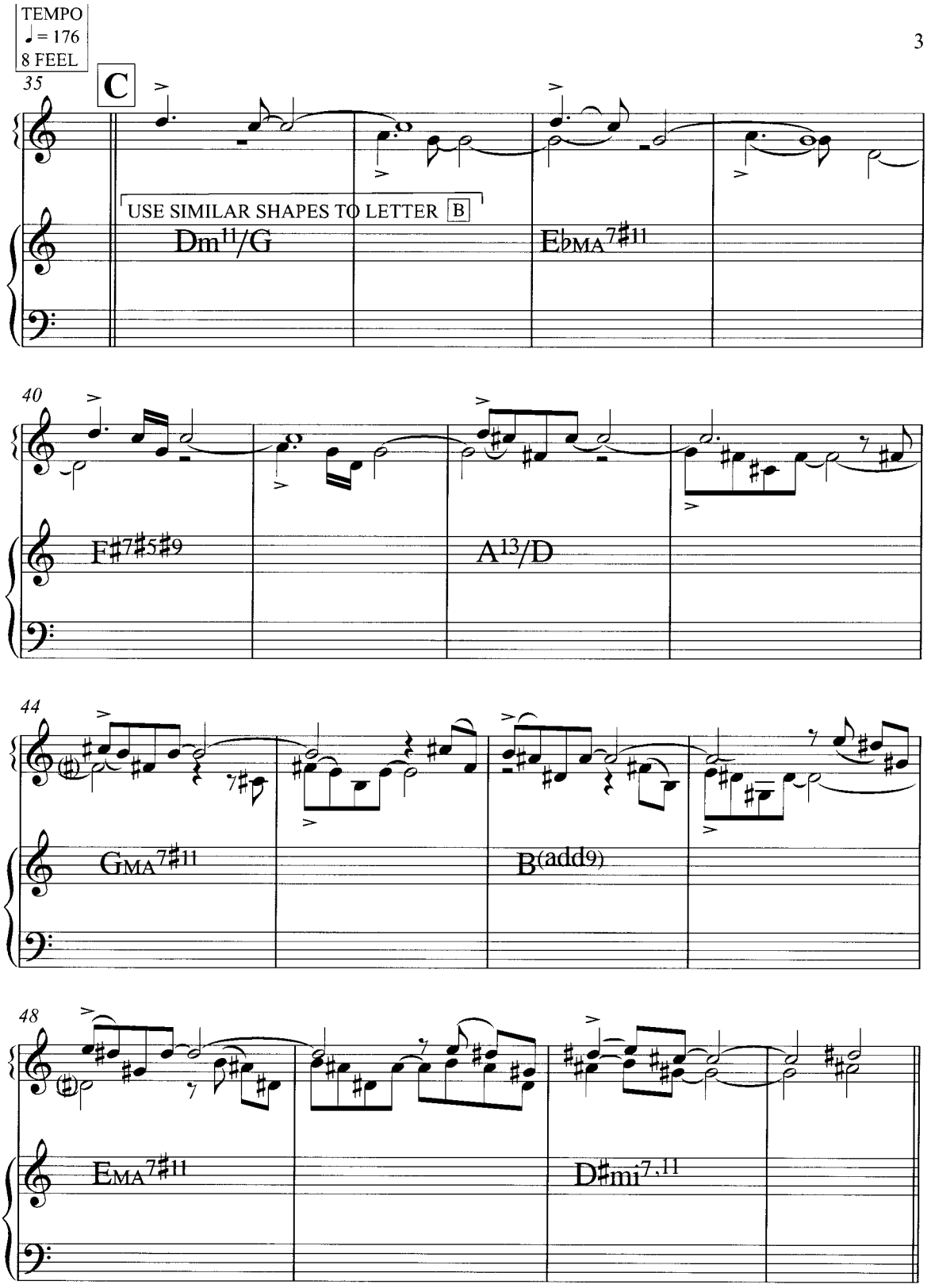

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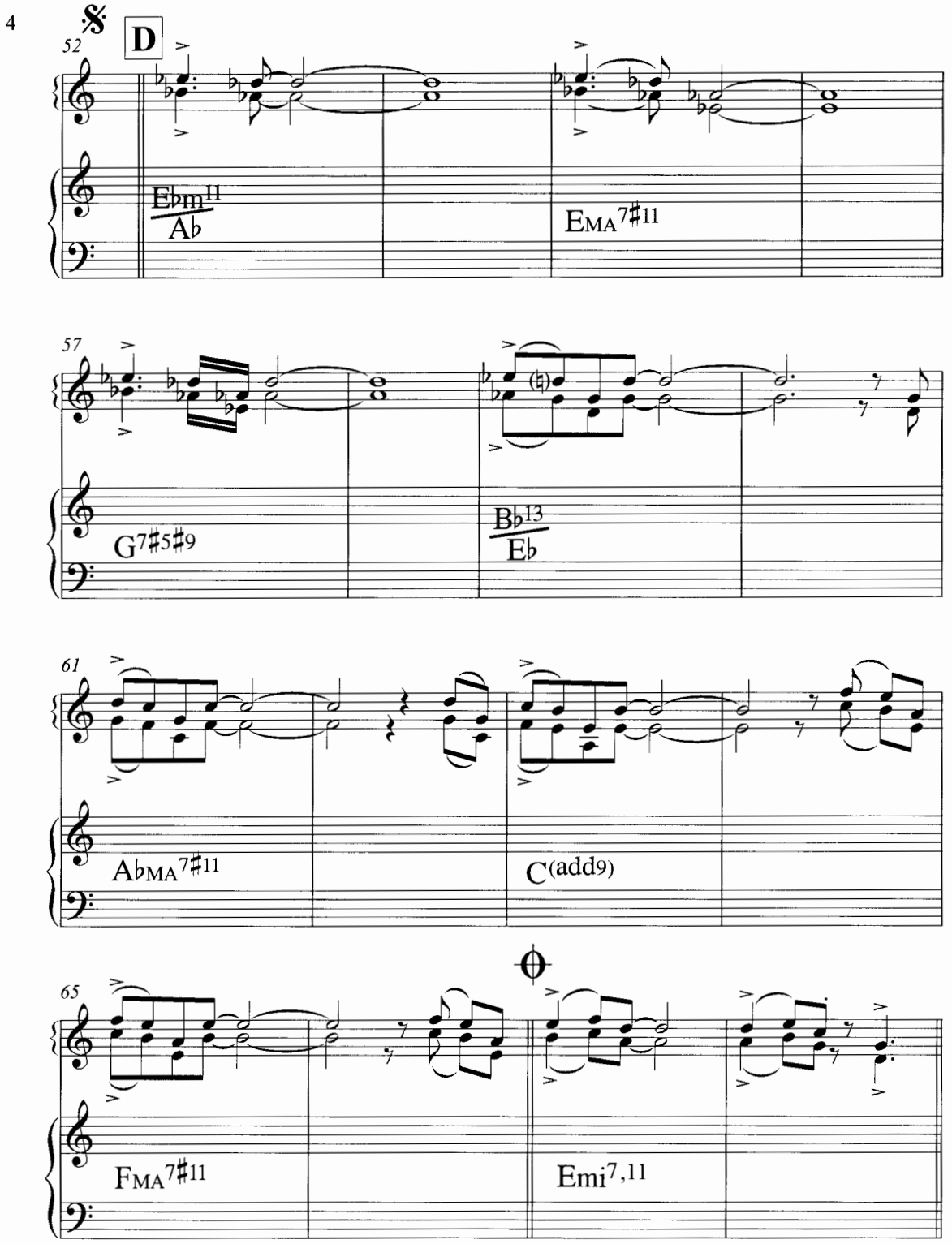

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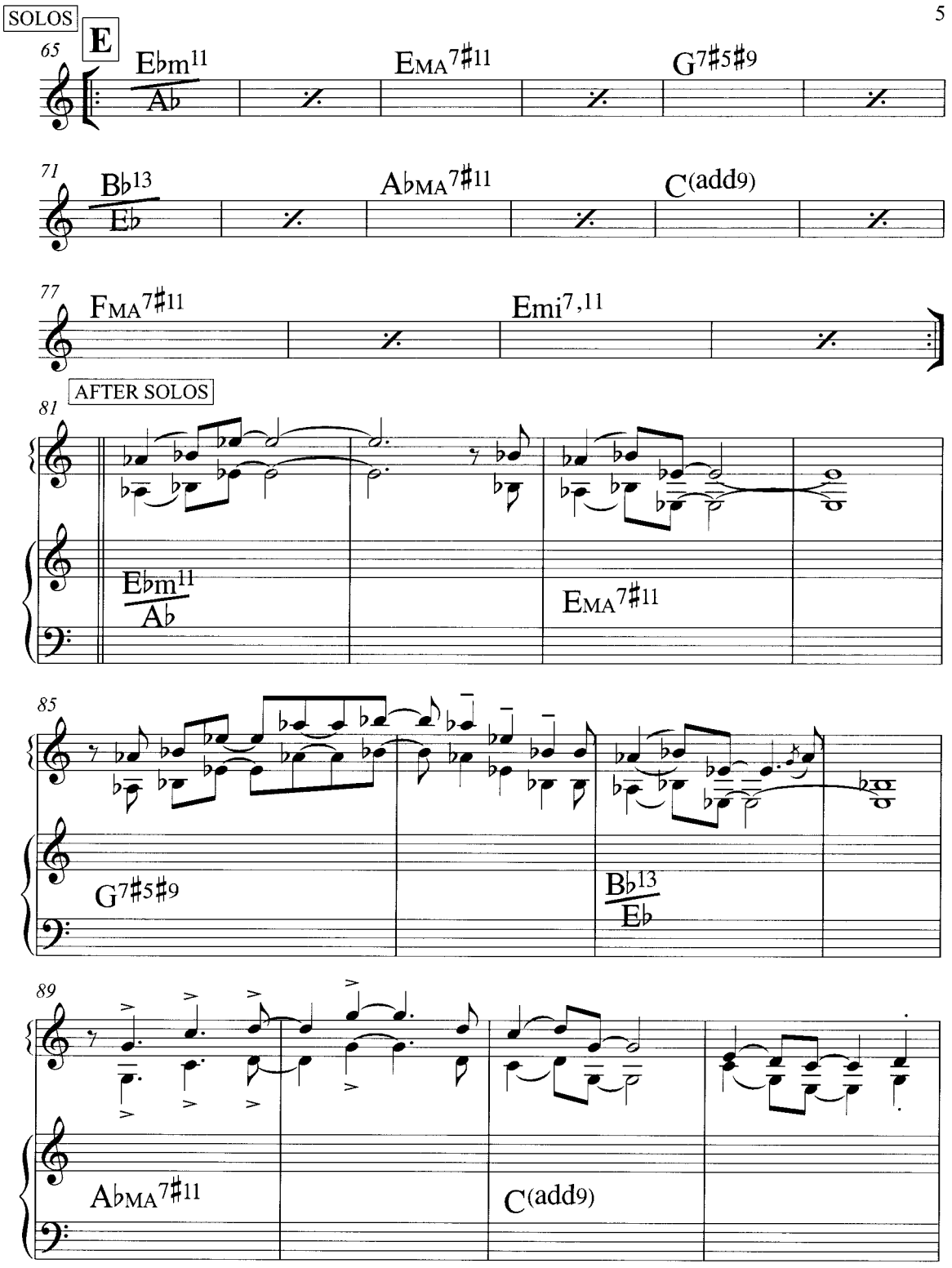

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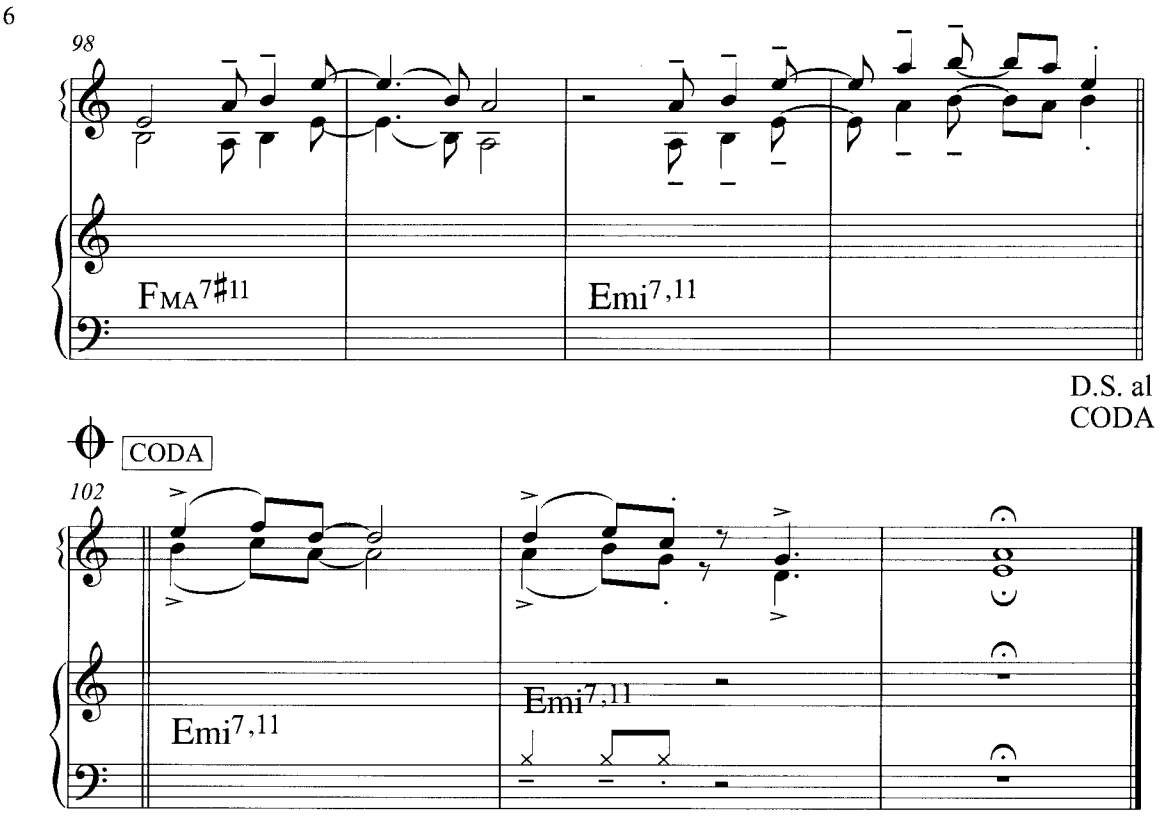

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