



DAVID LARSEN, PHD - FRIDAY MARCH 15, 2024

# REIMAGINING JAZZ COMPOSITIONS: MODERN APPROACHES TO JAZZ IMPROVISATION AND COMPOSITION

2024 National Conference - North American Saxophone Alliance  
Stillwater, OK

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# DAVID LARSEN, PHD

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC DIRECTOR - SPOKANE FALLS CC

- Recording Artist for G2 Records
- Published with Dapper Page Music, iJazzMusic, PDF Band Music, and more
- Winner for JW Pepper Editors choice for 5 years
- “The Peplowski Project” was #11 for the year 2023 on the Roots Music Report

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# INTRODUCTION:

- Composing a melody: scale choices, harmonic implications, dual tonality
- Chord progressions: functional vs non-functional, modal, patterns, implied harmonies
- Chord voicings: triads, add chords, removing the seventh, shell voicings
- Form, meter, and rhythm: irregular phrases, extended forms, odd time signatures



# COMPOSING A MELODY:

- The most important part of any composition.
- Does it have to be difficult? Simple and elegant vs complex and virtuosic.
  - Yes or  No
- The melody defines the composition and often sets up the method of improvisation.
- To understand the harmony, the key is often to examine the accidentals or lack of accidentals in the melody.



# COMPOSING A MELODY: WAYNE SHORTER METHOD

## — El Duelo by Darryl Yokley:

Play Audio

**D7sus(b9)**

Measures 1-4: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Measure 1: D4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 2: G4, F4, E4, D4. Measure 3: D4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 4: G4, F4, E4, D4.

**D<sup>b</sup>ma7(b5)** / **C**

Measures 5-8: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Measure 5: D4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 6: G4, F4, E4, D4. Measure 7: D4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 8: G4, F4, E4, D4.

**D7sus(b9)**

Measures 9-12: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Measure 9: D4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 10: G4, F4, E4, D4. Measure 11: D4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 12: G4, F4, E4, D4.

**E<sup>b</sup>9**

Measures 13-16: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Measure 13: D4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 14: G4, F4, E4, D4. Measure 15: D4, E4, F4, G4. Measure 16: G4, F4, E4, D4.



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# COMPOSING A MELODY: WAYNE SHORTER METHOD

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-4) features a melody in the treble clef and piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The melody is written in 4/4 time and consists of a six-note scale: A-C-D-E $\flat$ -F-G. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords: D7sus( $\flat$ 9) in measure 1, A $\flat$ mi7( $\flat$ 5)/D in measure 2, and C $\flat$ mi6/D in measure 3. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the melody and piano accompaniment. The melody includes chords D $\flat$ ma7( $\flat$ 5) and /C. The piano accompaniment includes the chord C $\flat$ mi(add11).

- El Duelo by Darryl Yokley:
- Wayne Shorter Method
- The melody is derived from a six-note scale. (A-C-D-E $\flat$ -F-G)
- The original chord symbols help guide the bass notes and give the piano or guitar ideas for varying the chord voicings.
- As an improviser, the different scale shapes give variety to the solo and ways to approach the harmony.
- Similar songs:
- “It’s Just Talk” by Pat Metheny



# COMPOSING A MELODY: FALSE TONICIZATION

■ Bye Bye Blackbird reharmonization by David Larsen:

[Play Audio](#)

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four staves. The first staff shows the melody with a  $Gmi^9$  chord above it. The second staff is marked with a circled 'A' and a  $Gmi^9$  chord. The third staff is marked with a  $Dmi^9$  chord and a '9' below the first measure. The fourth staff is marked with  $C^{13sus}$ ,  $D^{13sus}$ ,  $Gmi^9$ , and  $E^b9$  chords. A '13' is written below the first measure of the fourth staff.



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# COMPOSING A MELODY: FALSE TONICIZATION

**A**

Gmi<sup>9</sup>

Dmi<sup>9</sup>

C<sup>13</sup><sub>sus</sub> D<sup>13</sup><sub>sus</sub> Gmi<sup>9</sup> E<sup>b9</sup>

13

- Bye Bye Blackbird reharmonization by David Larsen
- False Tonicization: a scale that resolves to a note other than tonic.
- The melody is in F major, while the harmony is in a G minor mode.
- This makes the melody target the seventh, ninth, and eleventh of the key.
- A minor pentatonic based on five or a major pentatonic based on four of a minor key are common.
- “For an Unfinished Woman” by Gerry Mulligan





# COMPOSING A MELODY: PATTERNS

Play Audio



- “Nu Nu” by Avishai Cohen showcases the sparse harmony, but also the simple patterns, rhythmic displacement, and non-standard rhythmic accents.

The musical score is presented in piano format, showing both the right and left hands. It is divided into several systems, each with specific chord voicings and bass notes indicated above the staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 10/8. The score includes various chord voicings such as Dmi, G/B, Gmi/Bb, Dmi/A, Dsus., E, Eb, A7, F, Fsus F, Gmi/D, and Dmi. The score concludes with a 'FINE' marking and a copyright notice for 2006 Gadu Music (BMI).

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# COMPOSING A MELODY: PATTERN/LOOPS

- “Nu Nu” by Avishai Cohen:
- The melody is based on repetitive patterns. The form of the melody is extended with multiple sections.
- The basic mode is D minor with various diatonic chords of D minor.
- The bass line acts as a melody, and the piano line is more of an obligato/ostinato.
- The moving bass notes are independent of the harmony. The chromatic bass line causes the static D minor melody to move into different harmonic spaces.
- Influenced by modern popular music, the melody, bass line, and chord progression are presented as a loop. Unlike earlier jazz compositions, contemporary composers often create loop-based melodies.



# COMPOSING A MELODY: PATTERN/LOOPS

The image displays two systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment. The first system, starting at measure 9, features a treble clef staff with a 7/8 time signature and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line of eighth notes, while the bass staff provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Above the first two measures of the treble staff is the label "Dmi - Various Bass Notes" in red. Above the third measure is the label "Fsus F" in red. The second system, starting at measure 13, also has a treble and bass clef staff. The treble staff shows a series of chords, with the label "Gmi/D" in red above the first measure and "Dmi" in red above the second measure. The word "FINE" is written in the bass staff between the second and third measures. Both systems conclude with a double bar line and repeat dots.

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# COMPOSING A MELODY: PATTERN/LOOPS

29

Dsus Dmi                      Dsus. Dmi                      Dmi/G

33

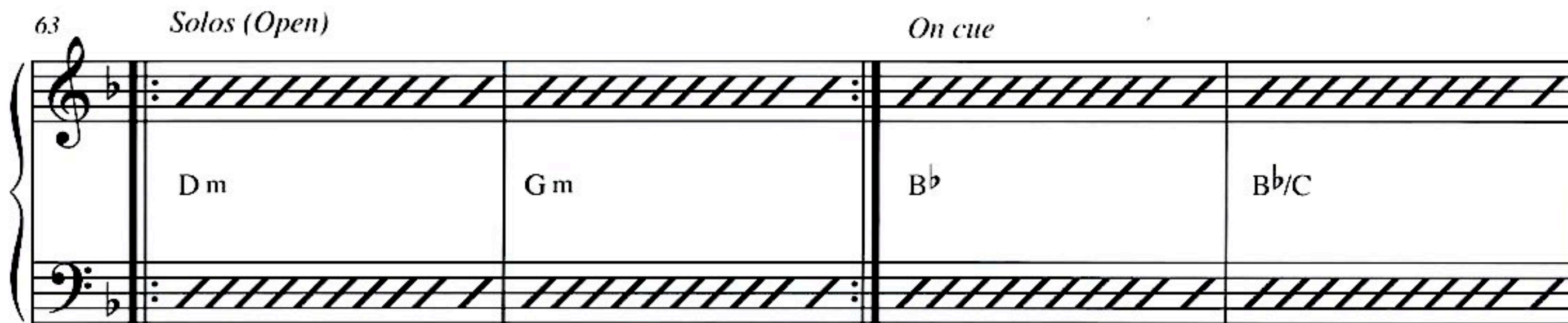
Dsus Dmi                      Dmi/G                      Dsus Dmi                      Dmi/G

- “Nu Nu” by Avishai Cohen:
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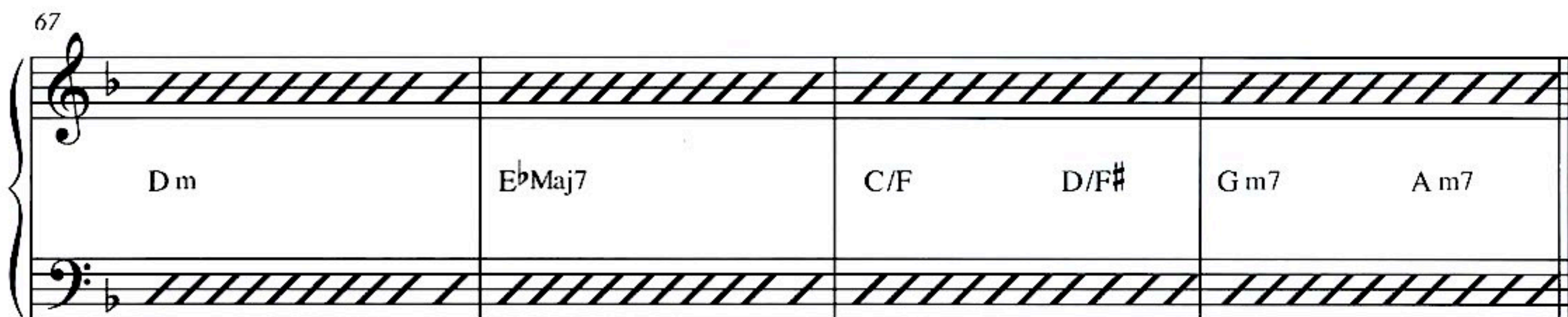
# COMPOSING A MELODY: PATTERN/LOOPS

63 *Solos (Open)* *On cue*



63	64	65	66
<i>Solos (Open)</i>	<i>Solos (Open)</i>	<i>On cue</i>	<i>On cue</i>
Dm	Gm	B $\flat$	B $\flat$ /C

67



67	68	69	70
Dm	E $\flat$ Maj7	C/F	D/F#
		Gm7	Am7

*After solos, D.C. al Fine*

- “Nu Nu” by Avishai Cohen:
- The solo section at the end of the extended melody continues to use basic chords from D minor.
- Small chromatic changes are added to give harmonic interest, but the basic D minor scale can be used to improvise over all of the chords.
- This harkens to the Wayne Shorter Method as well.



# CHORD PROGRESSIONS:

- In contemporary jazz, almost any harmonic technique from the past can be used, depending on the composition's mood.
- One newer development is a return to triads and simple chords.
- Suspended triads, major add2, and triads over altered bass notes are quite common.
- Some chords like a C/F are a way of disguising a F major seventh chord.
- This notation encourages comping players to play specific chord voicings to match the composer's harmonic concept.
- Using two and three note chords allows the improviser more flexibility.



# CHORD PROGRESSIONS:

Play Audio

- Suspended triads, major add2, and triads over altered bass notes are quite common.
- Some chords like a C/F are a way of disguising a F major seventh chord.



**Cadd2    Cadd4    C/D    F/G    Cadd4    F<sup>ma</sup>7/B<sup>b</sup>**

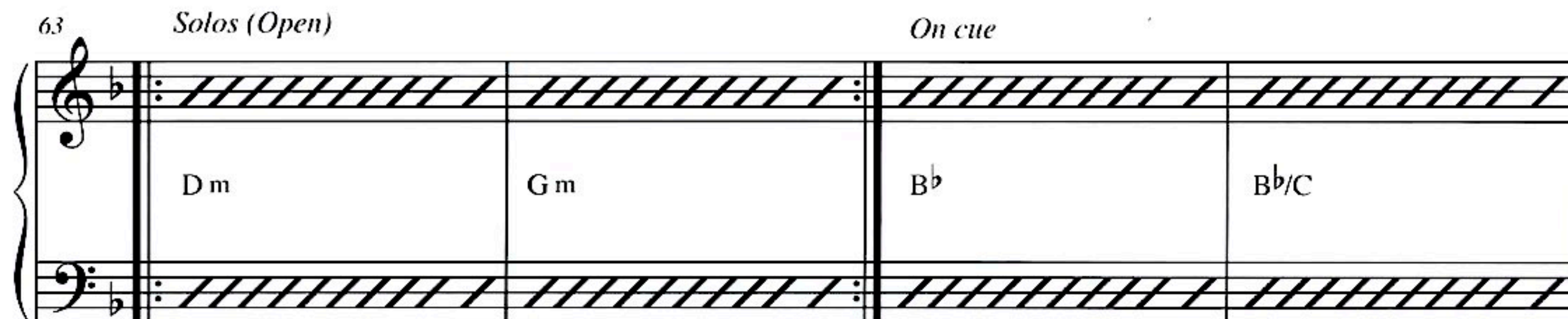
9                                      10                                      11                                      12



# CHORD PROGRESSIONS:

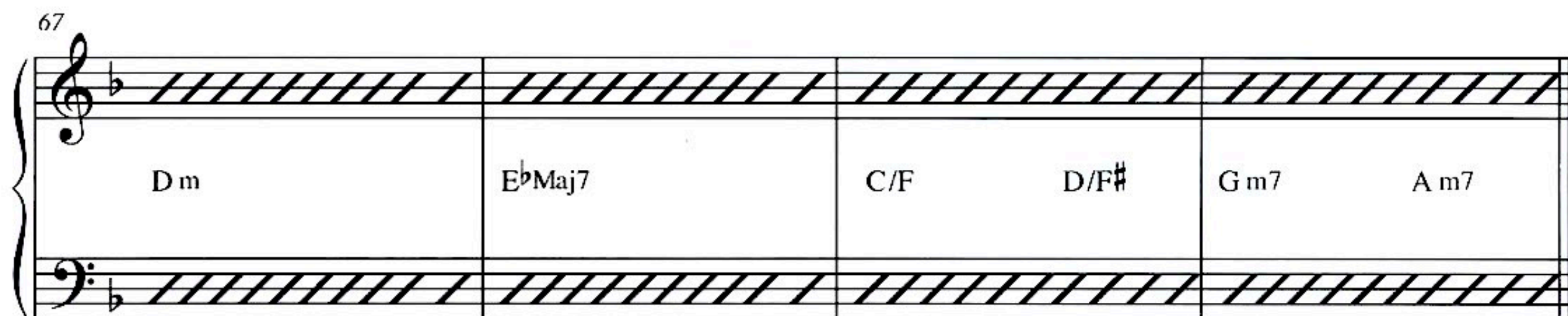
- Similar chord shapes are used here.
- In the second section, the harmony is defined by the ascending bass line.

63 *Solos (Open)* *On cue*



63	64	65	66
<i>Solos (Open)</i>	<i>Solos (Open)</i>	<i>On cue</i>	<i>On cue</i>
Dm	Gm	B $\flat$	B $\flat$ /C

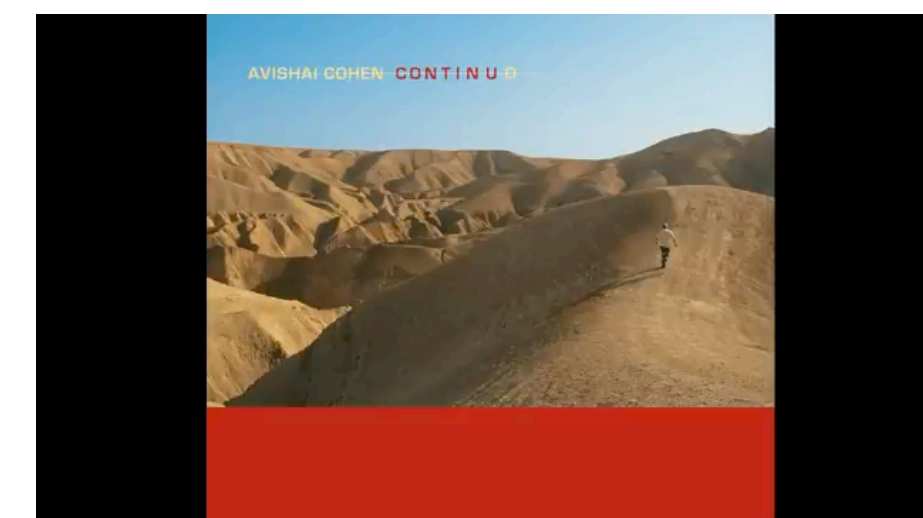
67



67	68	69	70
<i>Solos (Open)</i>	<i>Solos (Open)</i>	<i>On cue</i>	<i>On cue</i>
Dm	E $\flat$ Maj7	C/F	D/F $\sharp$
			Gm7
			Am7

*After solos, D.C. al Fine*

Play Audio





# CHORD PROGRESSIONS:

- Chord progressions may still be functional, but it has become more common for pieces to be based on modal ideas, chord sequences, or modal chords with functional bass notes.
- In “Nu Nu” and “El Duelo,” both composers used chromatic bass lines to outline the harmony.
- In “Nu Nu,” the triads essentially create a functional progression.  $B\flat$ ,  $Dmi$ ,  $E\flat ma7$ , and  $Gmi7$  all outline chord tones from a  $B\flat$  major chord, while  $B\flat/C$ ,  $C/F$ , and  $Ami7$  all outline chord tones from an F major chord.

$B\flat$     $B\flat/C$     $Dmi$     $E\flat ma7$     $C/F$     $D/F\sharp$     $Gmi7$     $Ami7$

33                      34                      35                      36                      37



# CHORD PROGRESSIONS:

Play Audio

- When employing a technique like the Wayne Shorter technique, chords may be placed in a pattern rather than a functional progression.
- In this reharmonization of “Cherokee” the bridge has chords that are 4ths apart with the addition of descending minor thirds in the bass notes.

49

$A^{b13}_{sus}$        $D^{b}maj^9/F$        $F^{\#13}_{sus}$        $Bmaj^9/D^{\#}$

49

$E^{13}_{sus}$        $A_{maj}^9/C^{\#}$        $D^{13}_{sus}$        $G^7_{sus}$

53

DAVID LARSEN

THE SEXTET SESSIONS

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# CHORD PROGRESSIONS:

- Another example of chords in sequence is my composition “Wednesday.”
- The bridge has a chromatic progression in minor thirds.

Play Audio

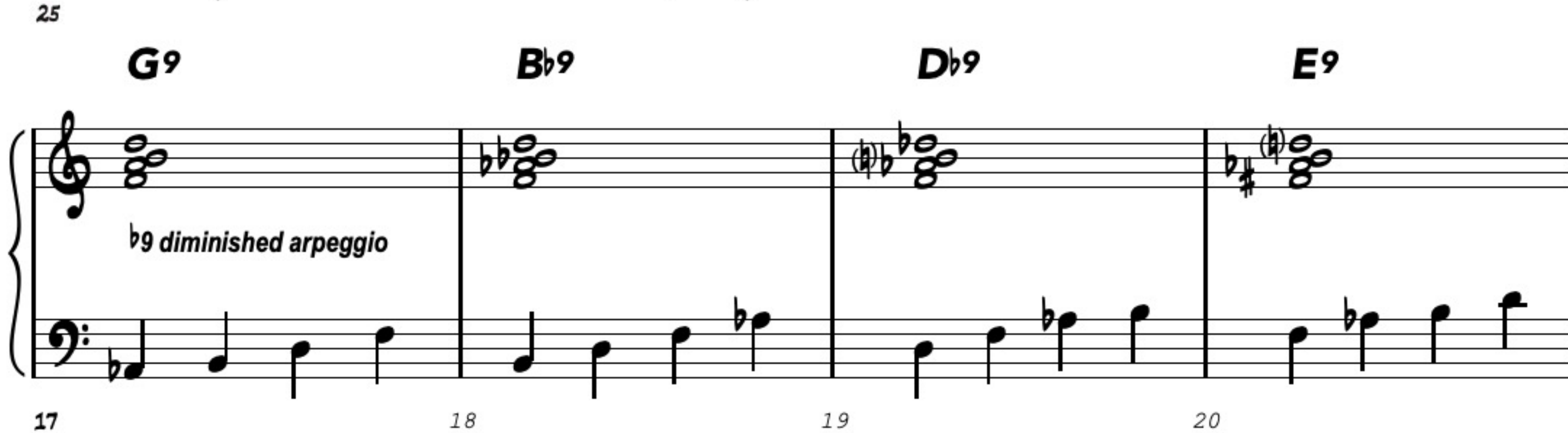
③  $G^9$   $B^b9$   $D^b9$   $E^9$   $C^{13}_{sus}$   $C^{7ALT}$




Musical notation showing a melodic line with chords:  $G^9$ ,  $B^b9$ ,  $D^b9$ ,  $E^9$ ,  $C^{13}_{sus}$ , and  $C^{7ALT}$ . The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes with various accidentals.

$G^9$   $B^b9$   $D^b9$   $E^9$


*b9 diminished arpeggio*



Musical notation showing a piano accompaniment with chords:  $G^9$ ,  $B^b9$ ,  $D^b9$ , and  $E^9$ . The notation includes a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. The left hand features a *b9 diminished arpeggio* pattern. Measure numbers 17, 18, 19, and 20 are indicated below the staff.



DAVID LARSEN



# FORM AND FUNCTION:

- In contemporary jazz triads, add9 chords, and polychords are used as a way to separate this style from traditional jazz. Jazz has been based on seventh chords since the days of Louis Armstrong, so avoiding these harmonies gives the music a fresh feel.
- Contemporary jazz sources more than just modal or American Song Book compositions. It often covers pop songs from the 1980s and 1990s. It also makes use of samples, loops, and repetitive grooves and progressions.
- Contemporary jazz is heavily influenced by ECM, hip-hop and rap. Many contemporary artists will use techniques like dropped beats, highly intricate drum grooves, and looping harmonic and melodic patterns.
- Melodic clarity is less vital than in previous generations. Some songs will have less of a melody and more of a melodic figure or pattern.
- It is quite common for a strict ostinato to be used in the music. Bass lines, drum grooves, even piano and guitar parts can all be part of the ostinato.



# FORM AND FUNCTION:

- Some of the leading contemporary jazz groups and artists today include:
- Robert Glasper - <https://youtu.be/2z8piOggNsw?si=UUKgpIX-OxTtx3wv>
- Ari Hoenig - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfwlW\\_a99Jw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfwlW_a99Jw)
- GoGo Penguin - <https://youtu.be/47XIUL6sRow?si=wAIW0M24UGF6oYt2>
- Avishai Cohen - [https://youtu.be/OVOPTwlcT\\_E?si=8q5msNenLIGWcyRm](https://youtu.be/OVOPTwlcT_E?si=8q5msNenLIGWcyRm)
- Tigran Hamasyan - [https://youtu.be/SQhKzP\\_9JuM?si=Dxou\\_ylv9Z9V3Uxs](https://youtu.be/SQhKzP_9JuM?si=Dxou_ylv9Z9V3Uxs)
- Mark Guiliana - <https://youtu.be/nWougERgnrE?si=FS319Q1s18D5UhXB>
- The Bad Plus - <https://youtu.be/q9hOSZGMXII?si=wtog-bDn3cGpjzxp>



# FORM AND FUNCTION:

The image displays four staves of musical notation, each representing a different drum groove. Staff 1 is in 4/4 time and features a series of eighth notes with accents and 'x' marks. Staff 2 is in 6/4 time and features a series of eighth notes with accents and 'x' marks. Staff 3 is in 5/4 time and features a series of eighth notes with accents and 'x' marks, transitioning to 4/4 time. Staff 4 is in 4/4 time and features a series of eighth notes with accents and 'x' marks.

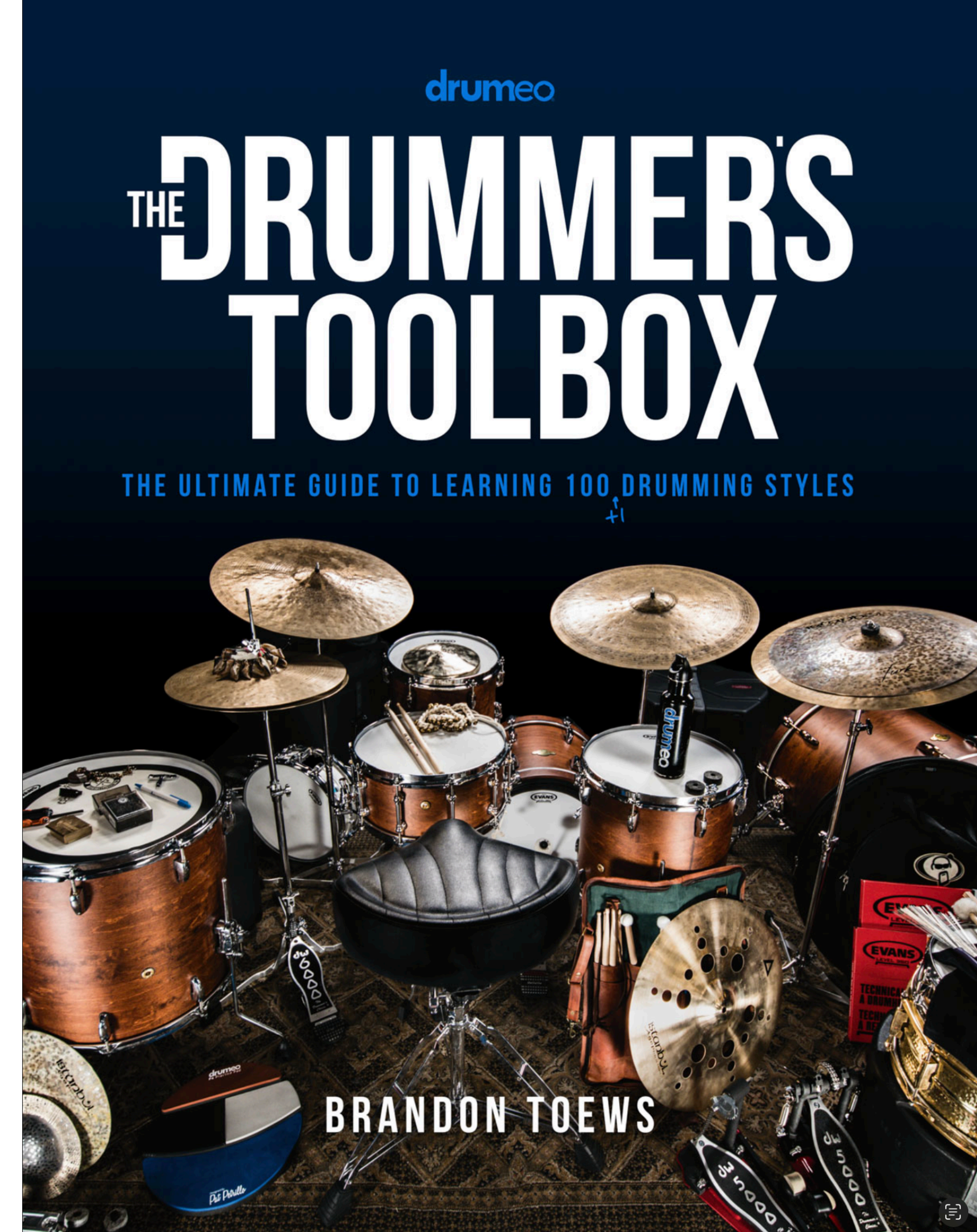
- 1: A basic example of a contemporary drum groove. 2: Kendrick Scott performs this pattern in the song “We Are the Drum” by his project, the Kendrick Scott Oracle. 3: This is another groove played by Mark Guiliana from the song “Pinzin Kinzin” by the Avishai Cohen Trio.

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# FORM AND FUNCTION:

- Major Source Material:
- DRUMMERS TOOLBOX: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO LEARNING 100 DRUMMING STYLES by Brandon Toews
- <https://www.drumeo.com/drumshop/the-drummers-toolbox>
- Mathew Montgomery - "Fremont Trolling" - <https://www.dapperpage.com/dapper-page-titles/fremont-trolling> (Inspired by Nirvana and Kings Kaleidoscope)
- David Larsen - "Archways" - <https://www.dapperpage.com/dapper-page-titles/archways> (Reggae inspired feel)
- Graham Breedlove - "Bayou Farewell" - <https://www.ejazzlines.com/bayou-farewell-arranged-by-graham-breedlove> (Ballad)
- Arr. Fred Sturm - "Bodysnatchers" - <https://www.ejazzlines.com/bodysnatchers-arranged-by-fred-sturm> (From the Radiohead Project)



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