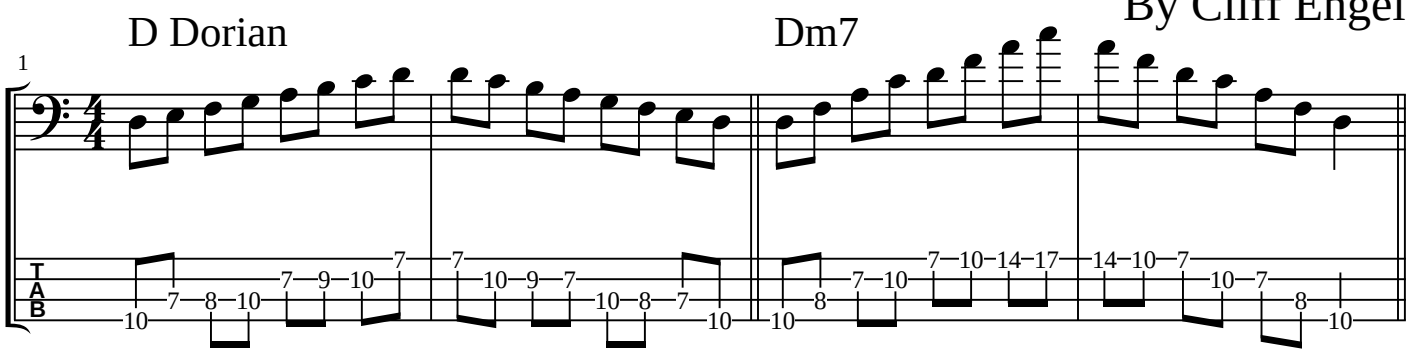
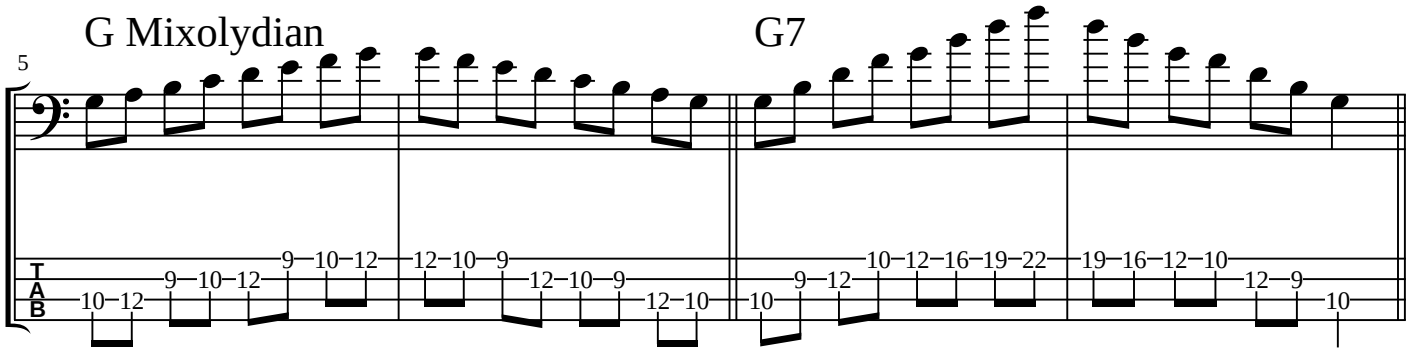
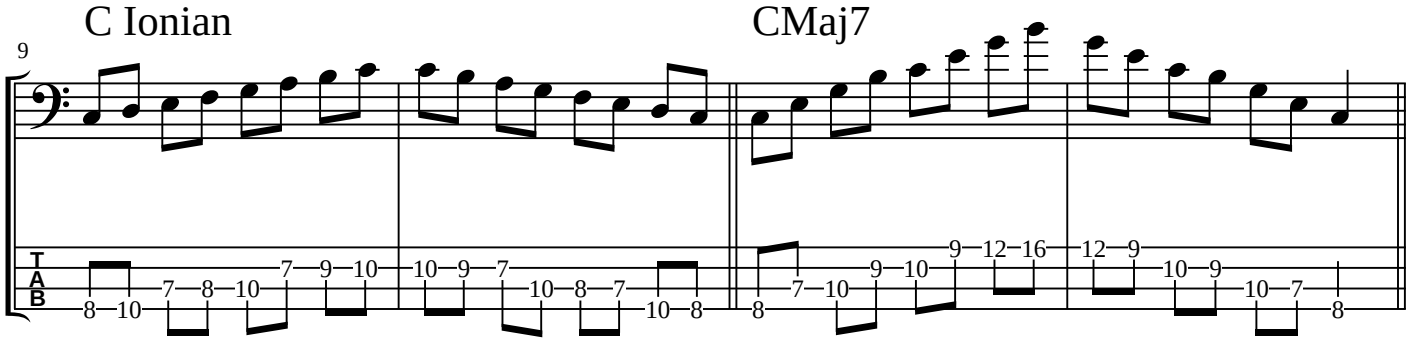
Jazz Improvisation

Targeting Chord Tones With Approach Notes

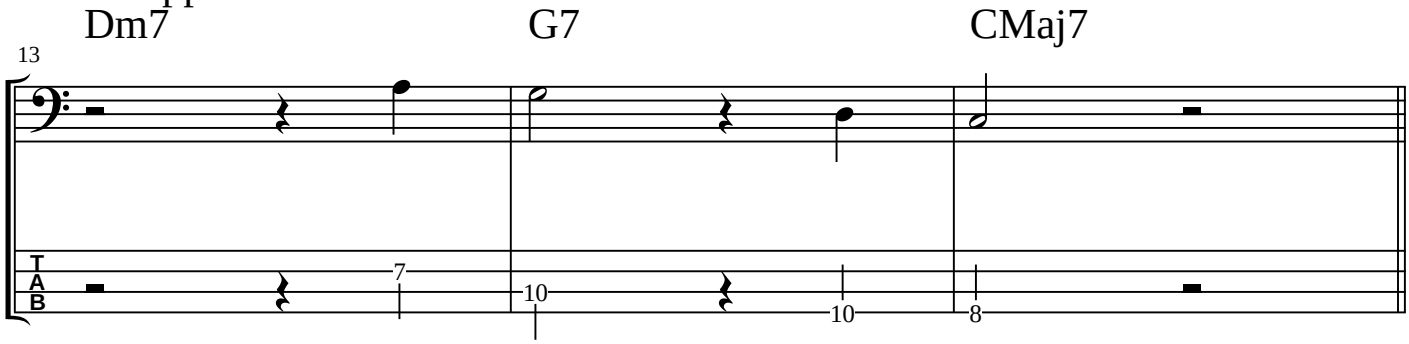
By Cliff Engel







Scalar Approach Note From Above The Root



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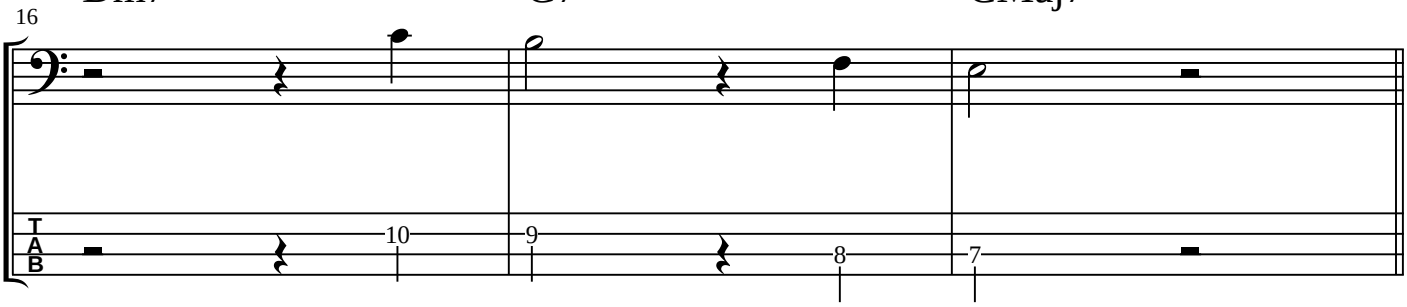
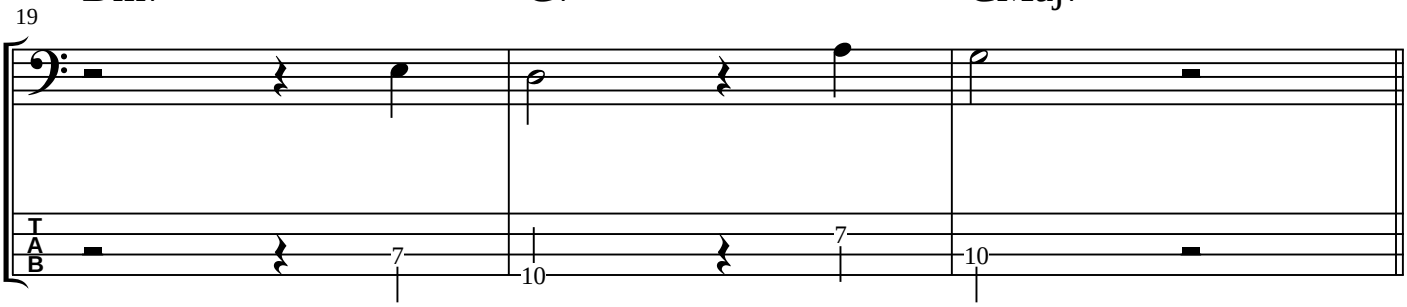
Scalar Approach Note From Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Scalar Approach Note From Above The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Scalar Approach Note From Above The 7th

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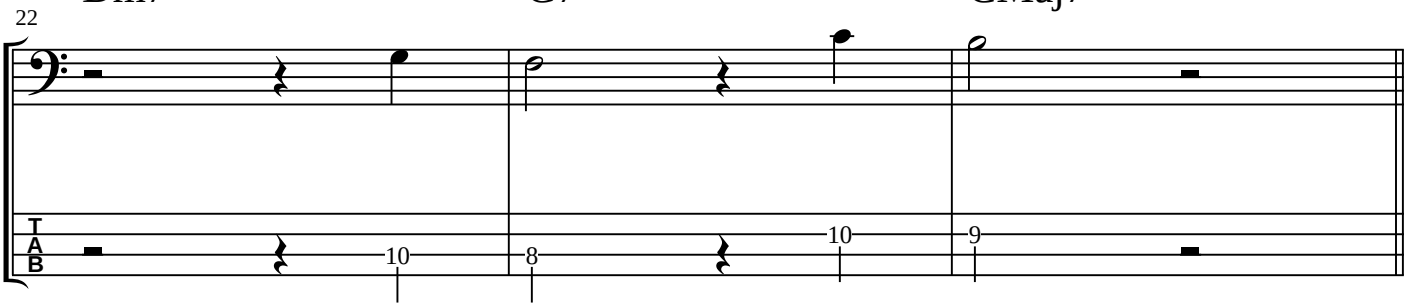

Scalar Approach Note From Below The Root

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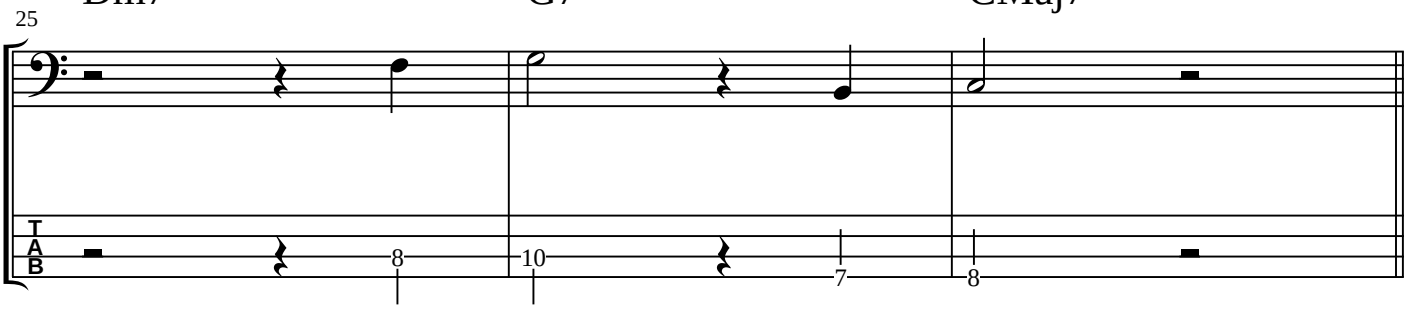

Scalar Approach Note From Below The 3rd

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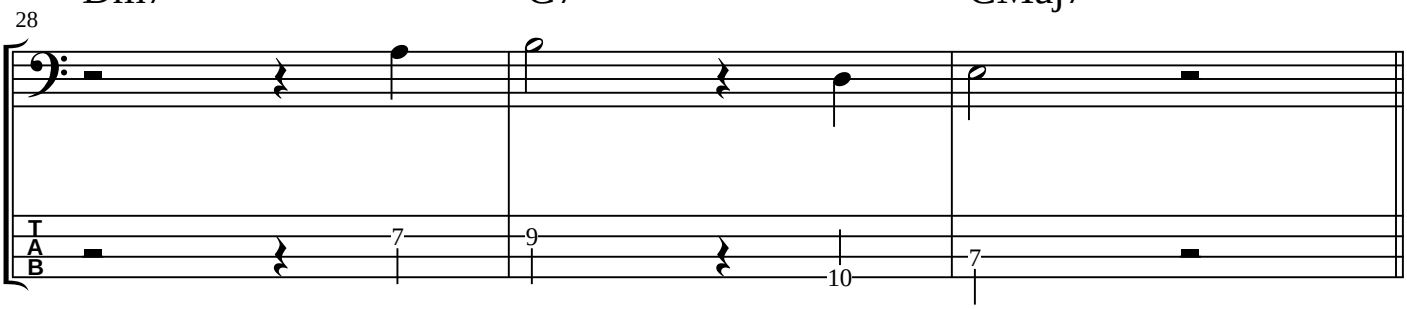

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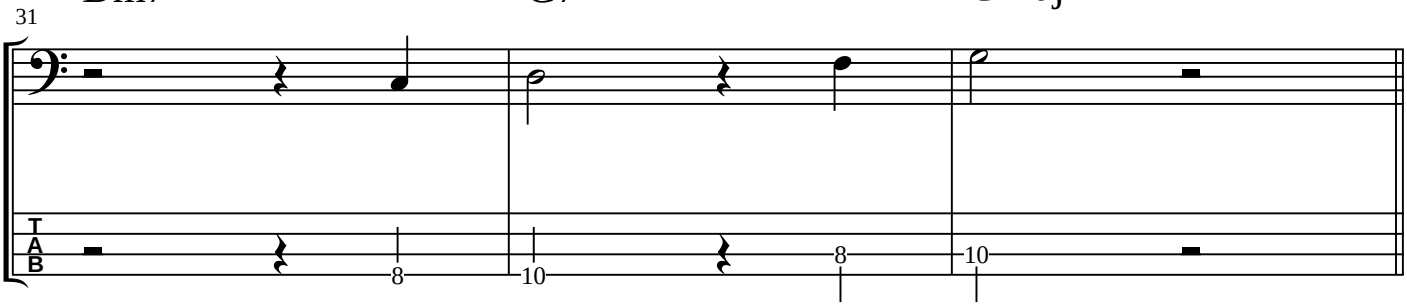

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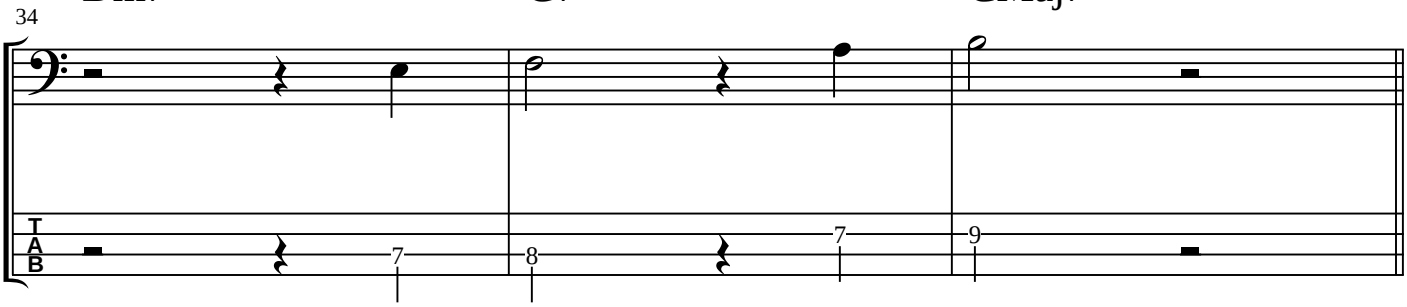
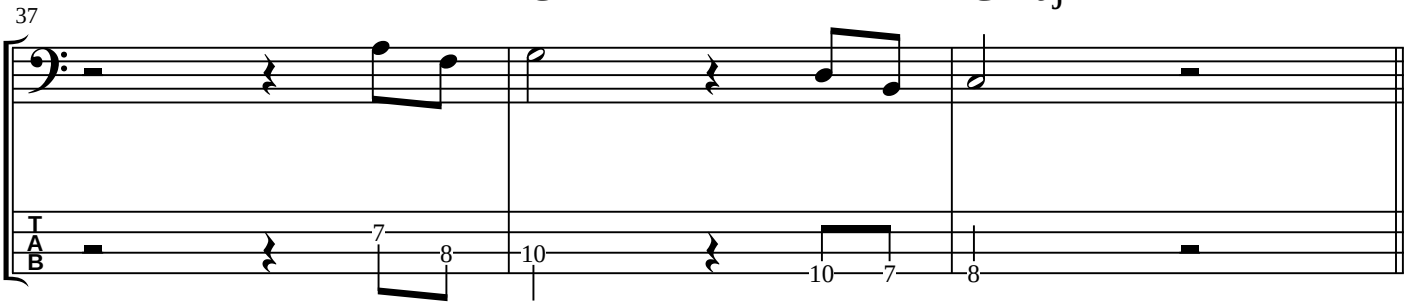


Scalar Approach Notes From Above & Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



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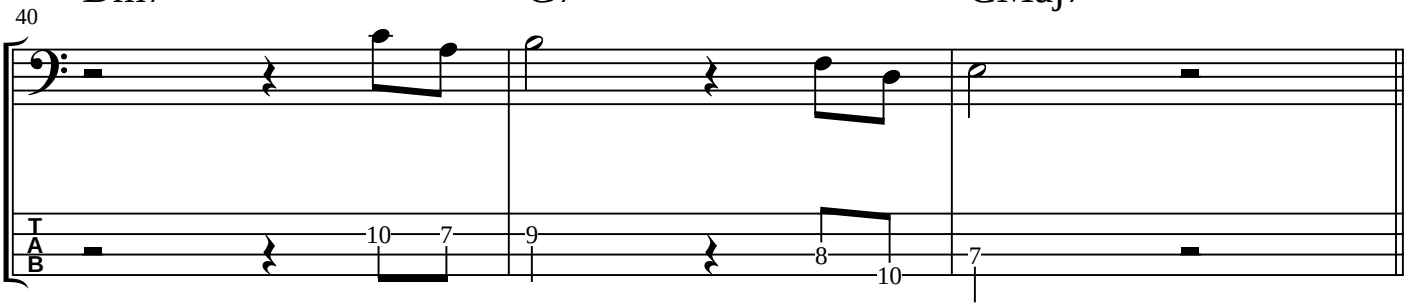

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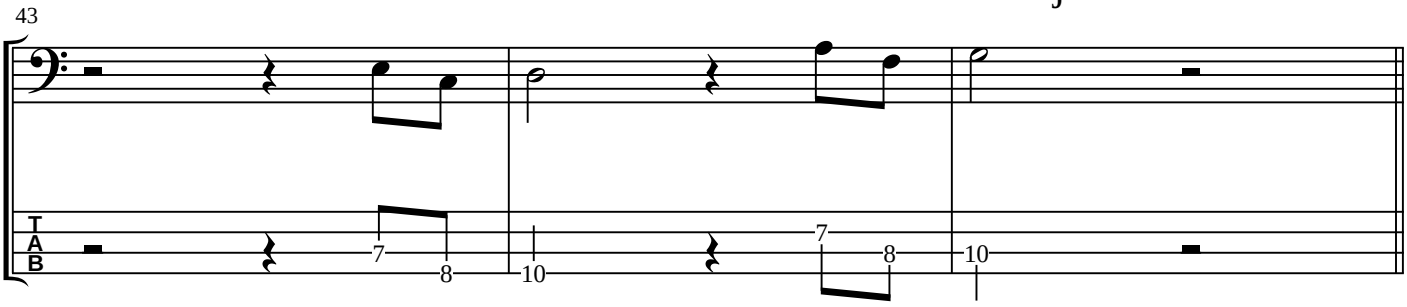

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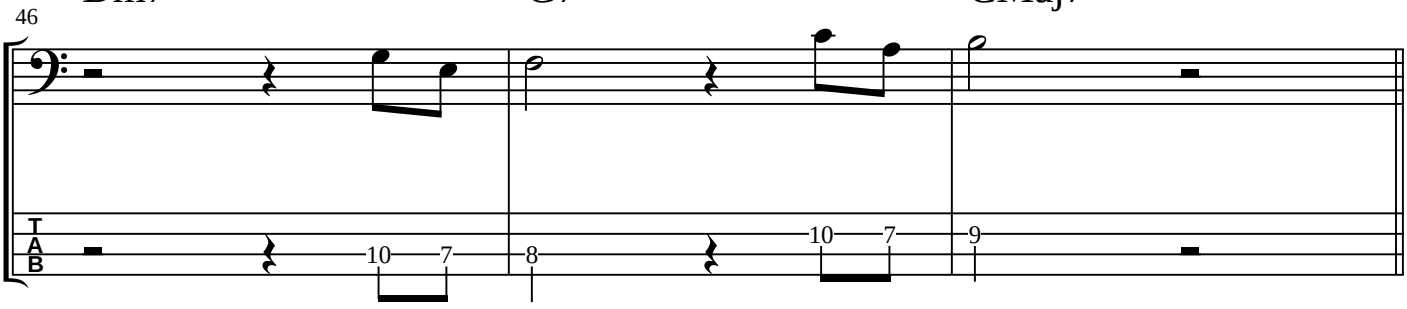

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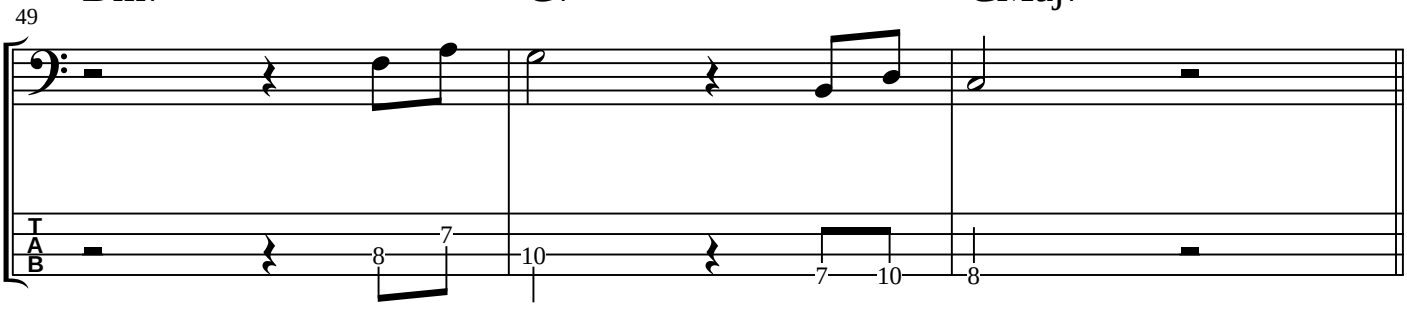
Dm7 G7 CMaj7



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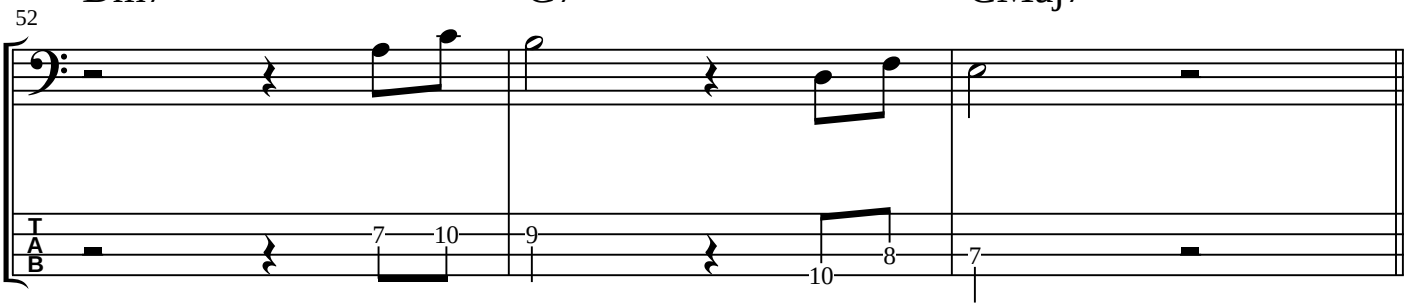
Dm7 G7 CMaj7



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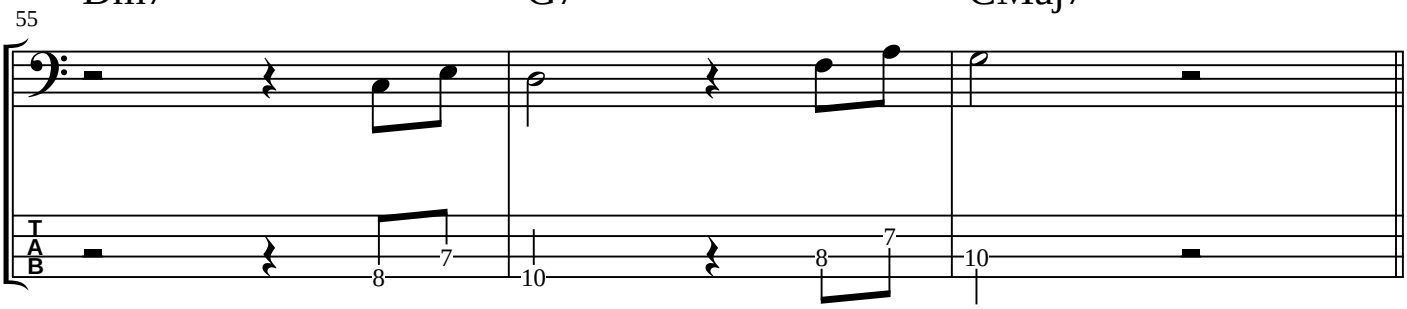

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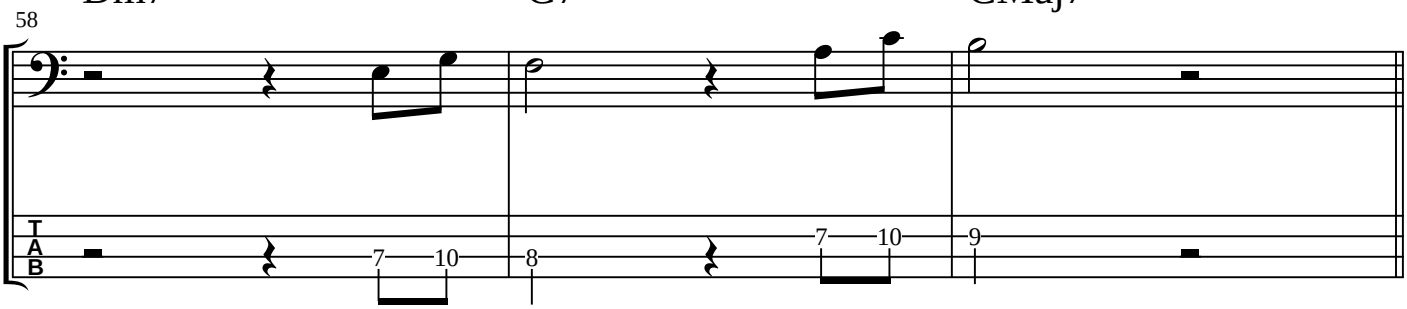
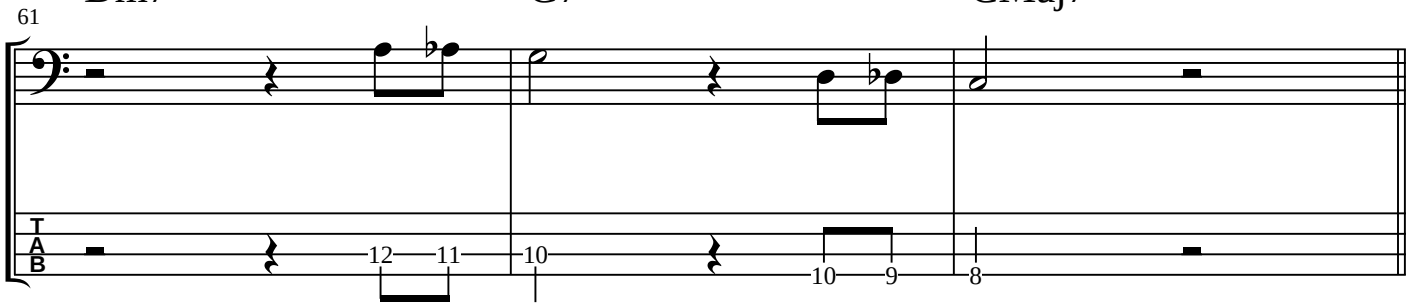
Dm7 G7 CMaj7



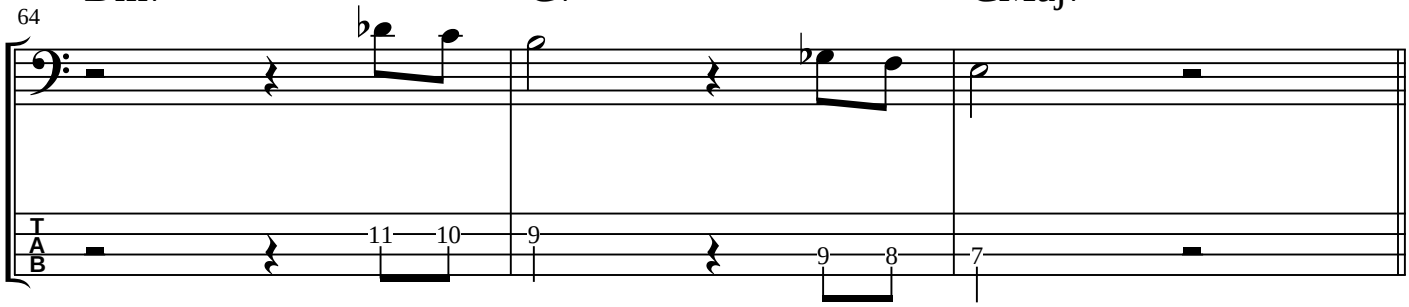
Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above The 5th

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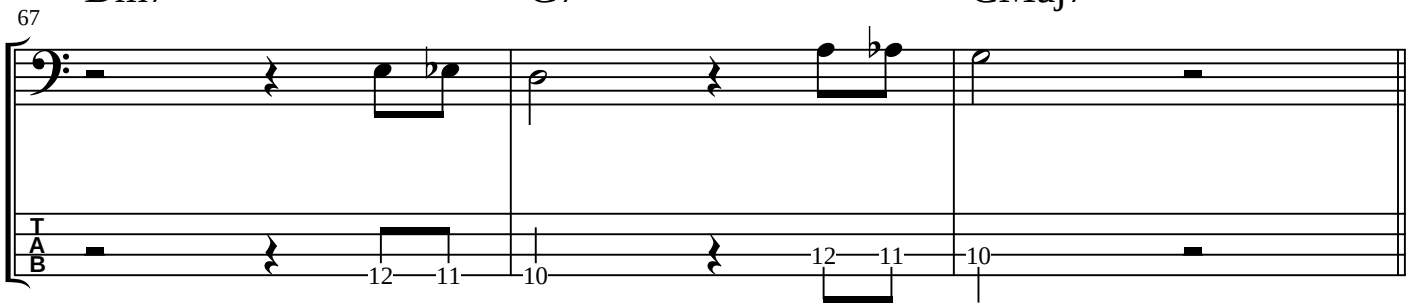

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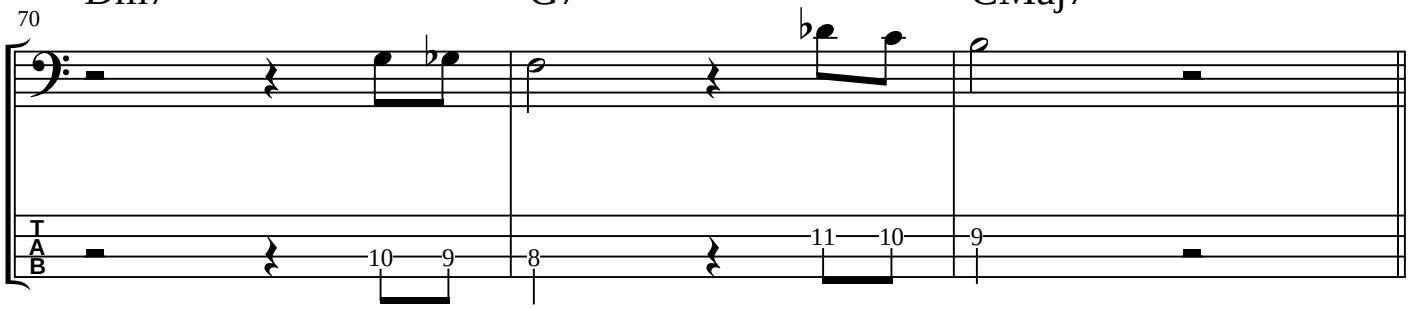

Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below The Root

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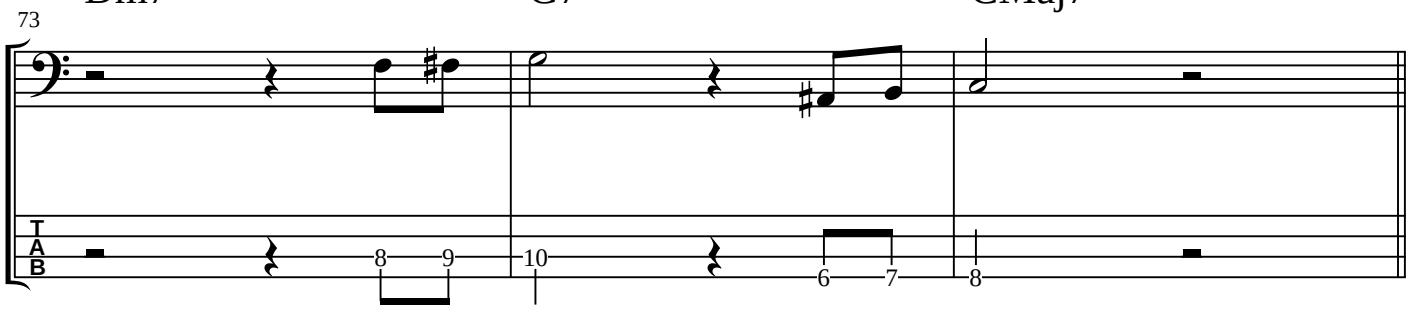

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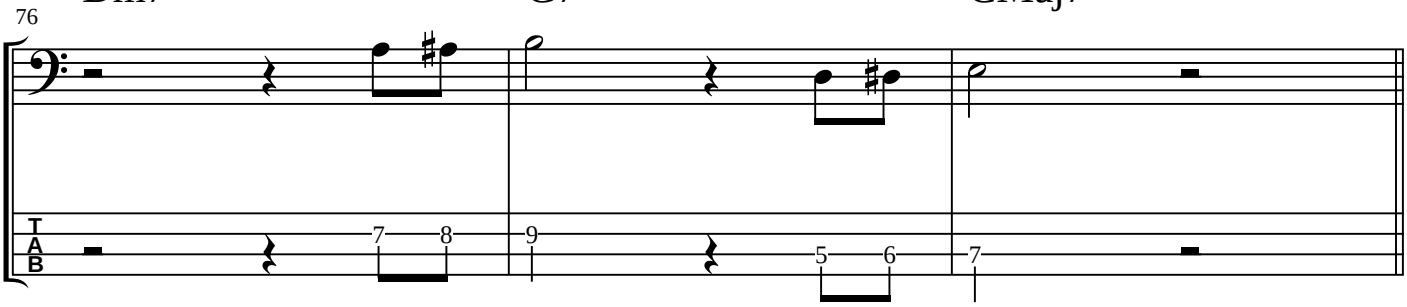

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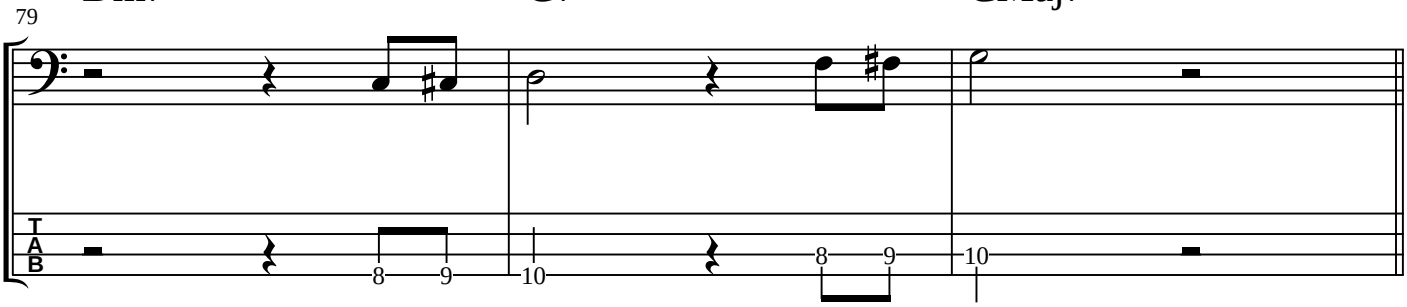

Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below The 7th

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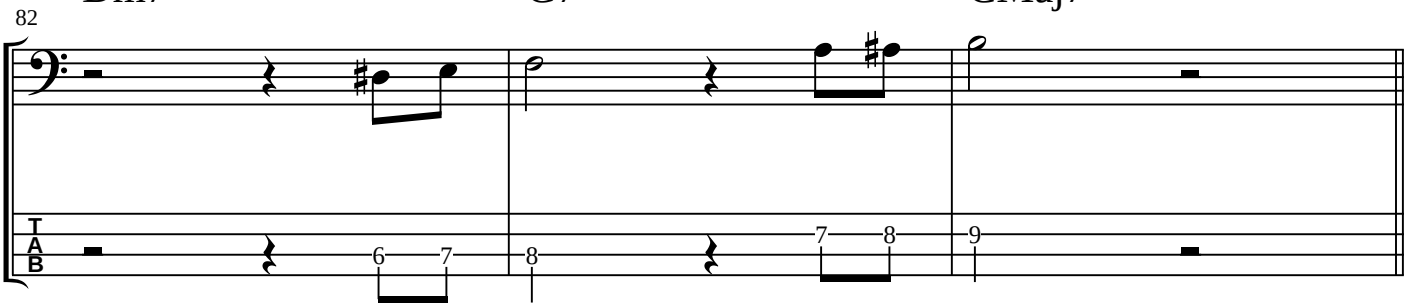
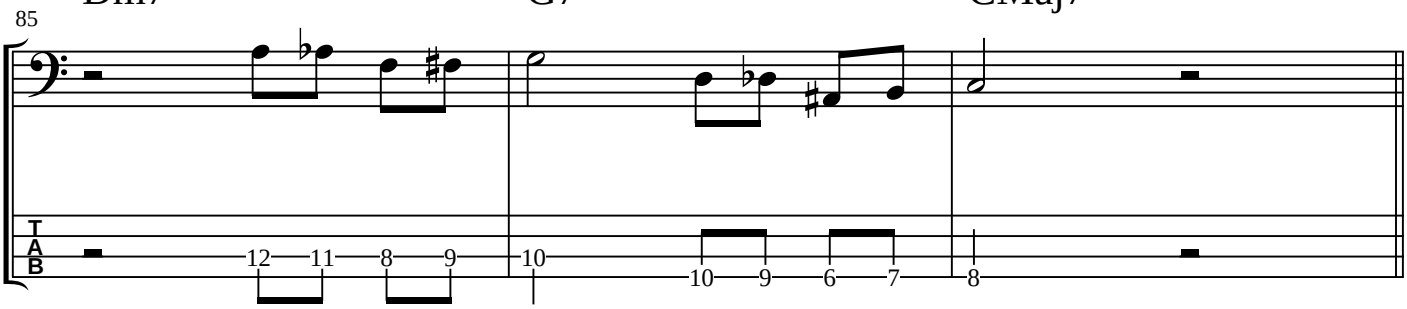


Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



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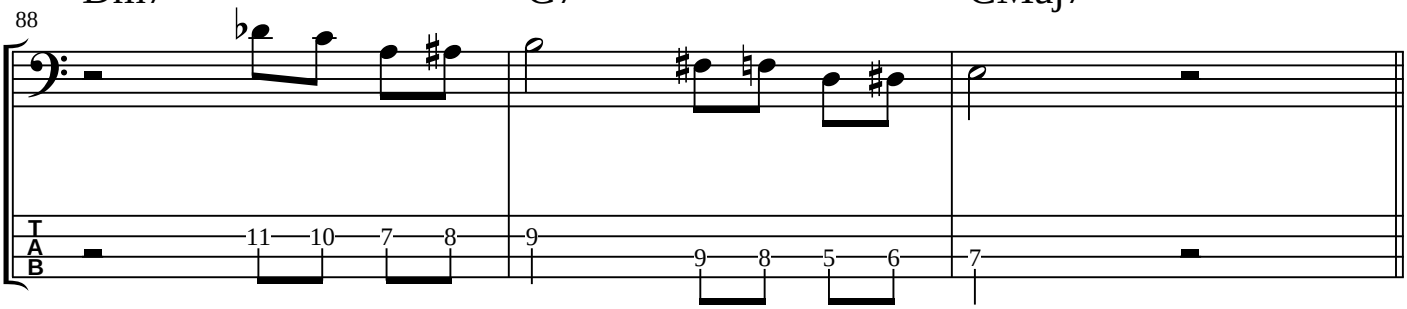
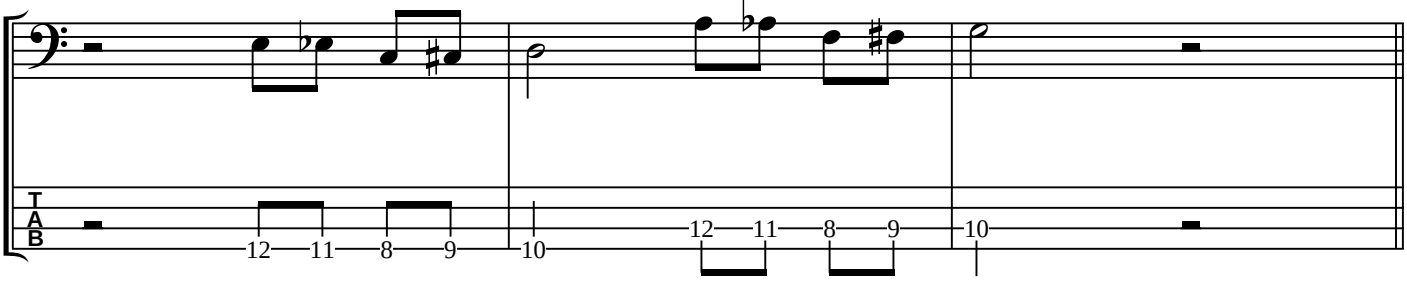


Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Below The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

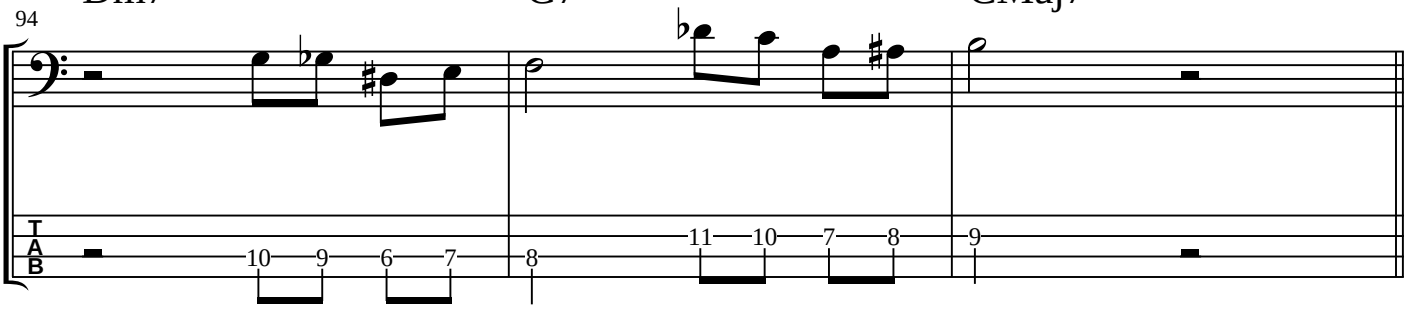
91



Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Below The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

94



Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

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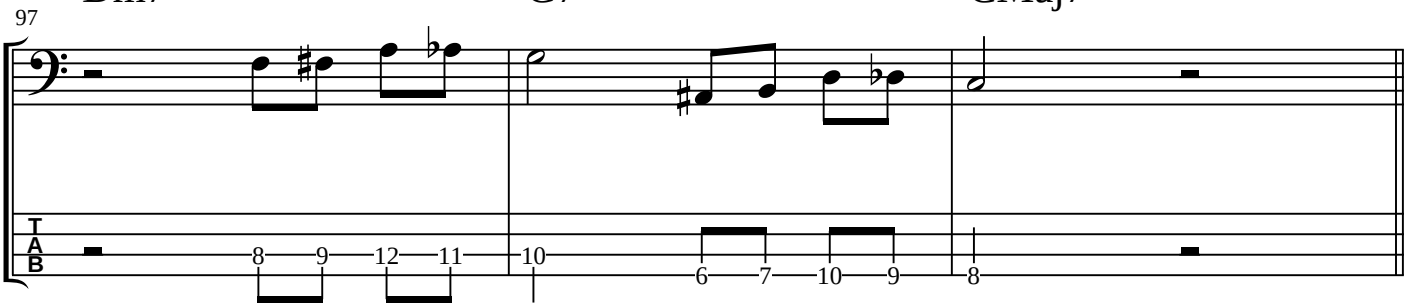

Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Above The 3rd

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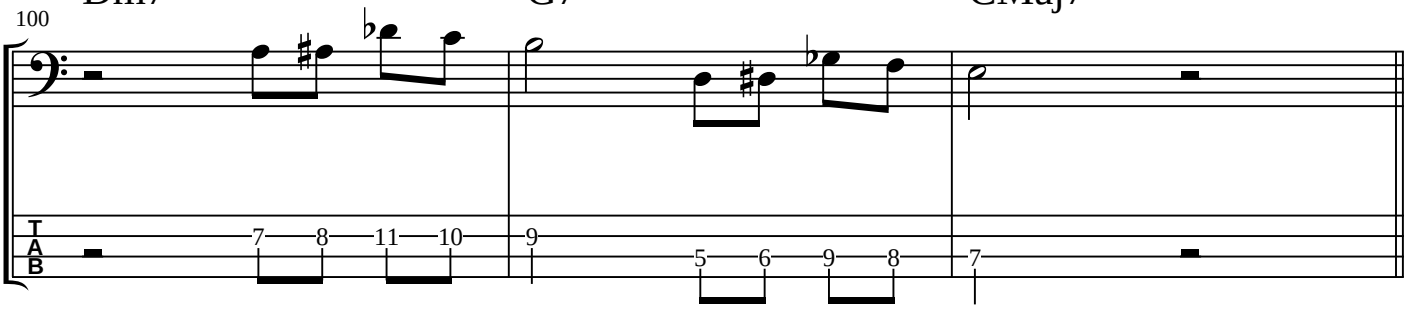

Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Above The 5th

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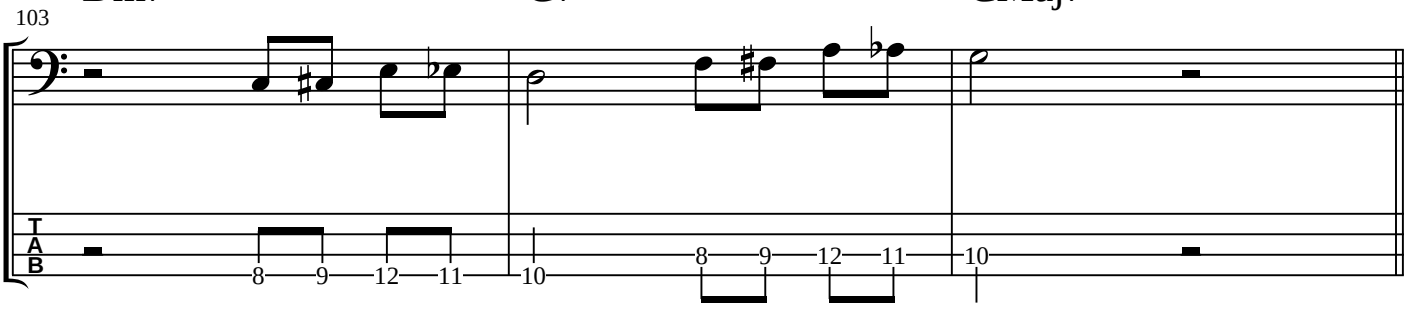
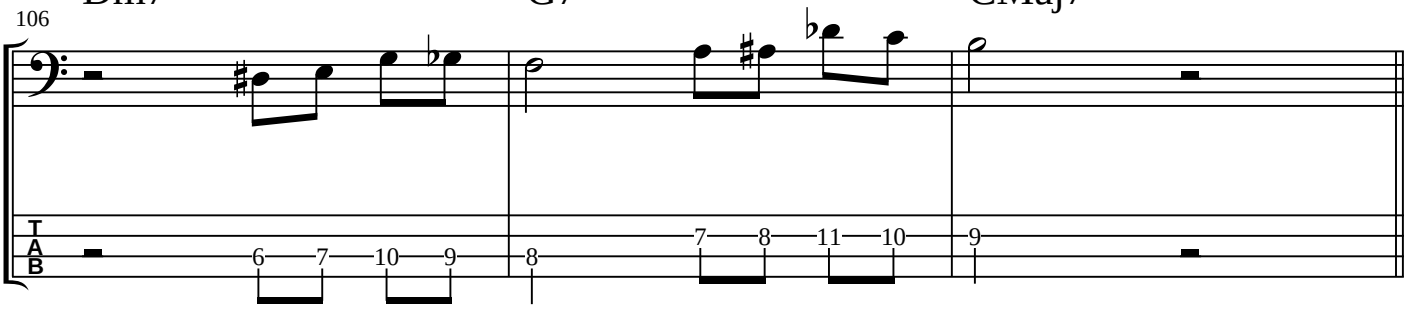
103



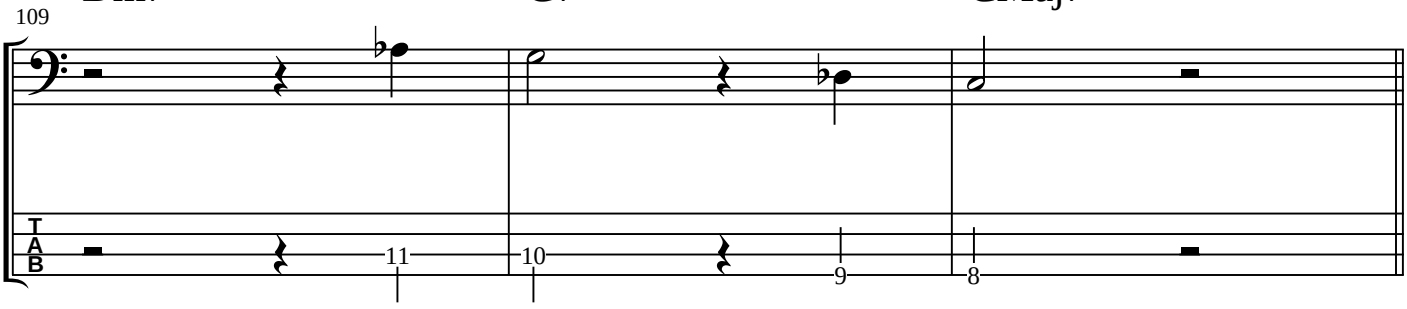
Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Above The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above The 3rd

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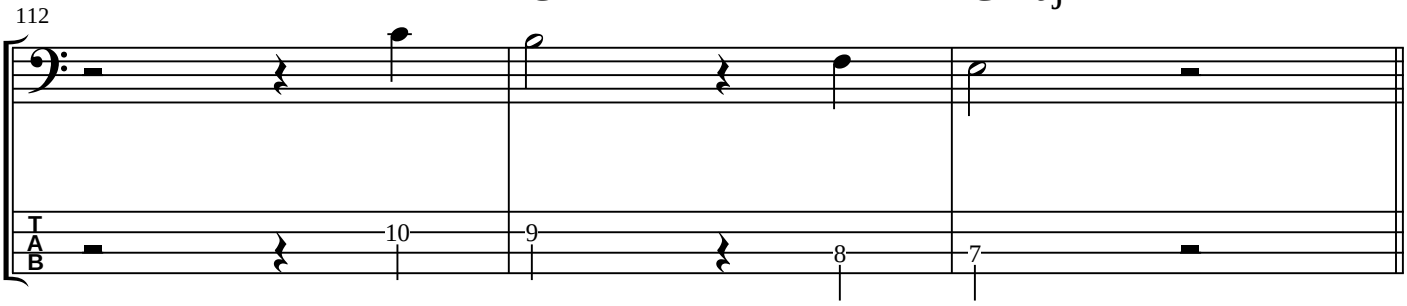

Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above The 5th

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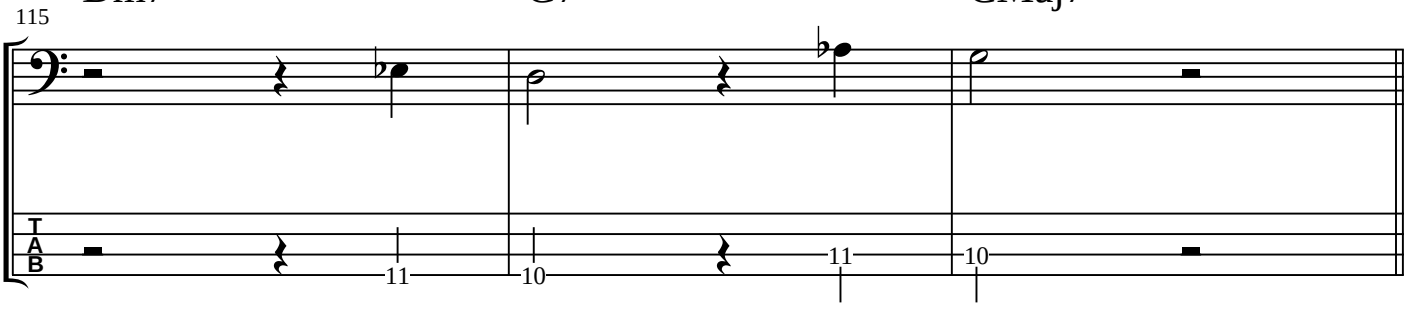

Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above The 7th

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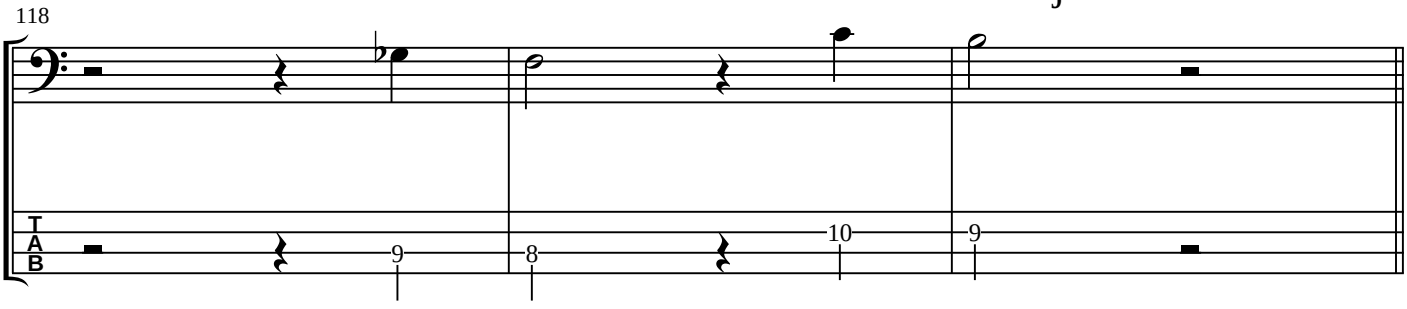
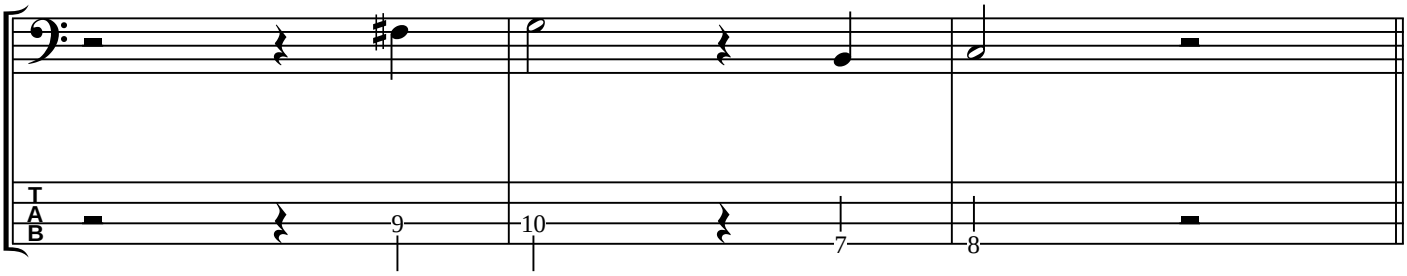


Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

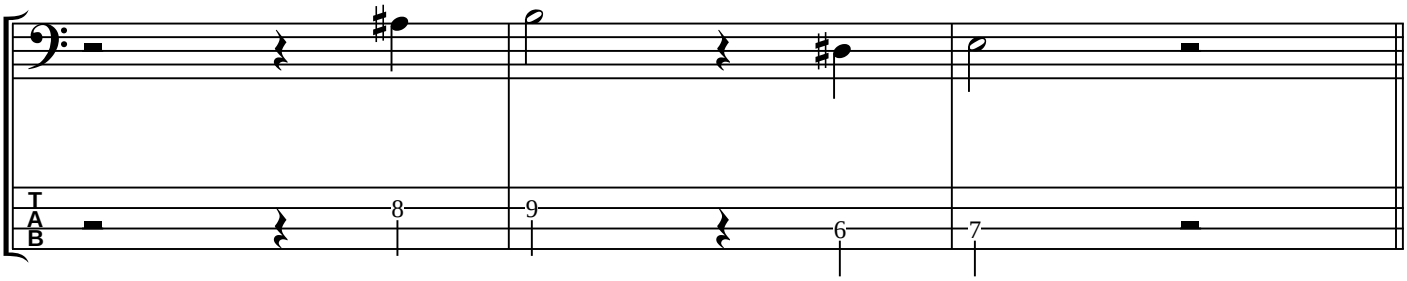
121



Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

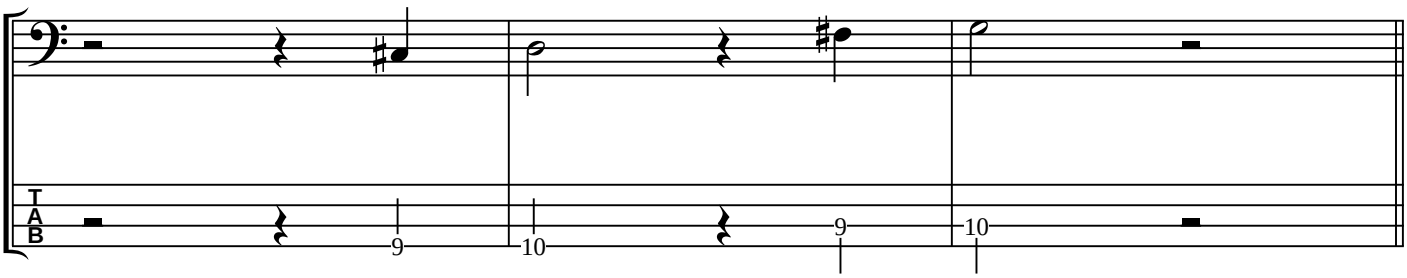
124



Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

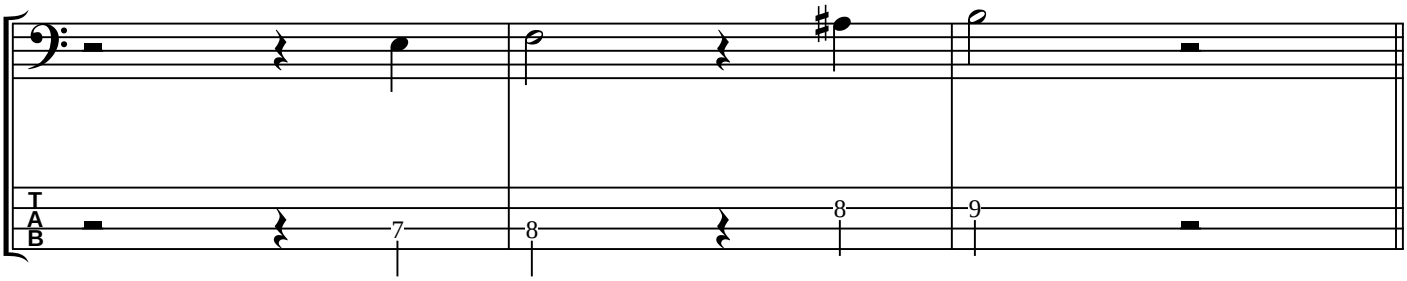
127



Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

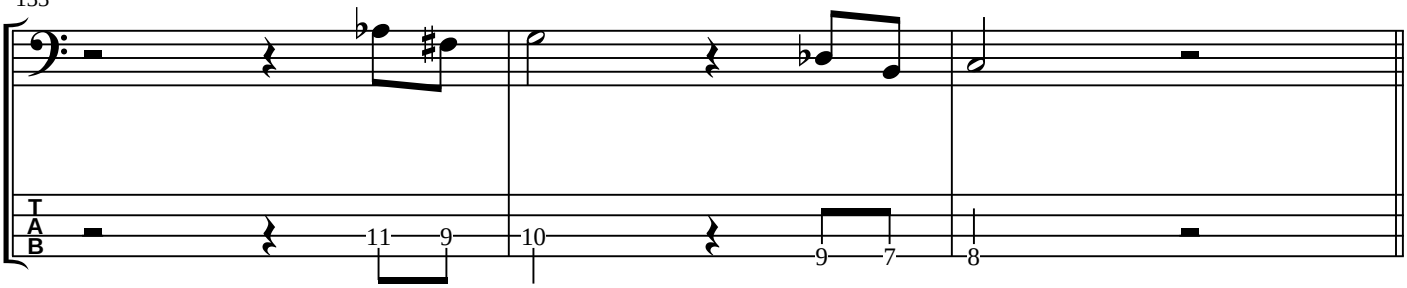
130



Single Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

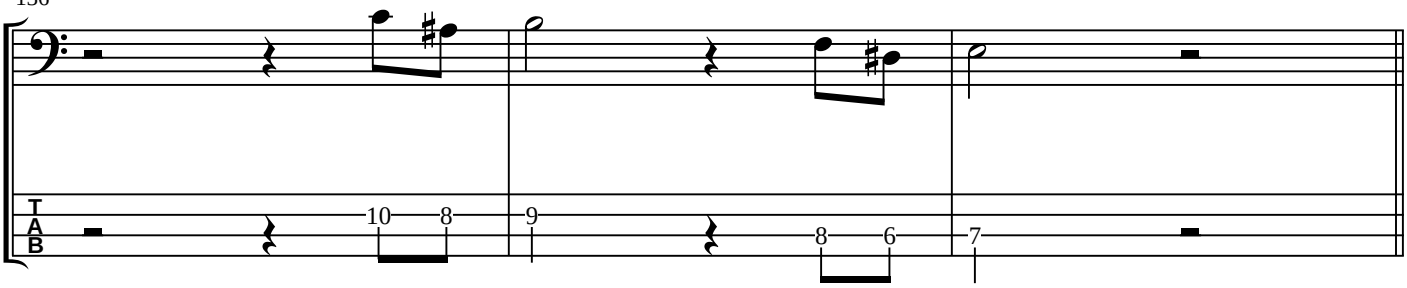
133



Single Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Below The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

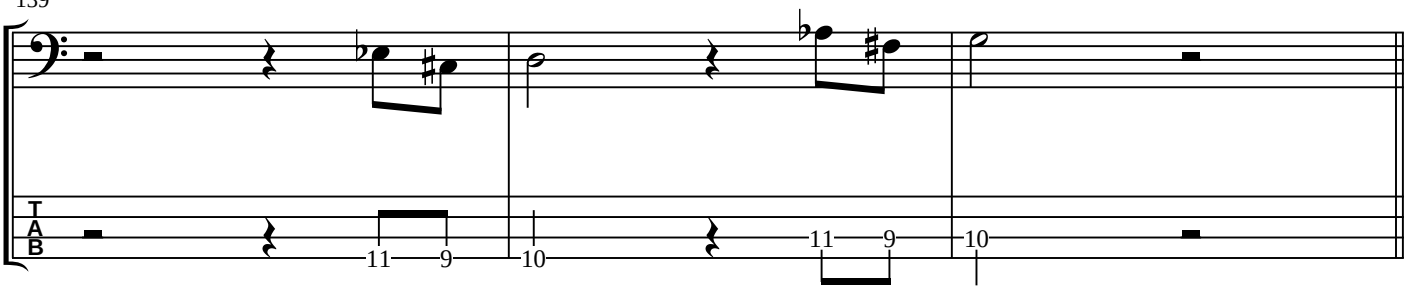
136



Single Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Below The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

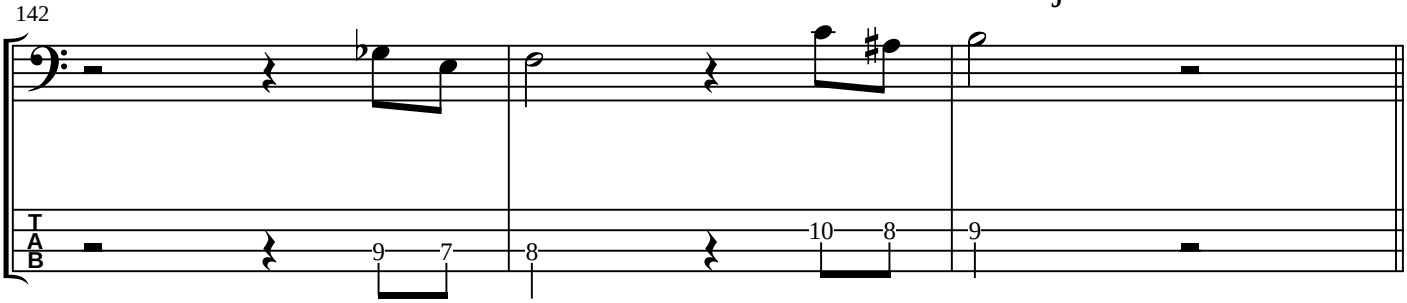
139



Single Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Below The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

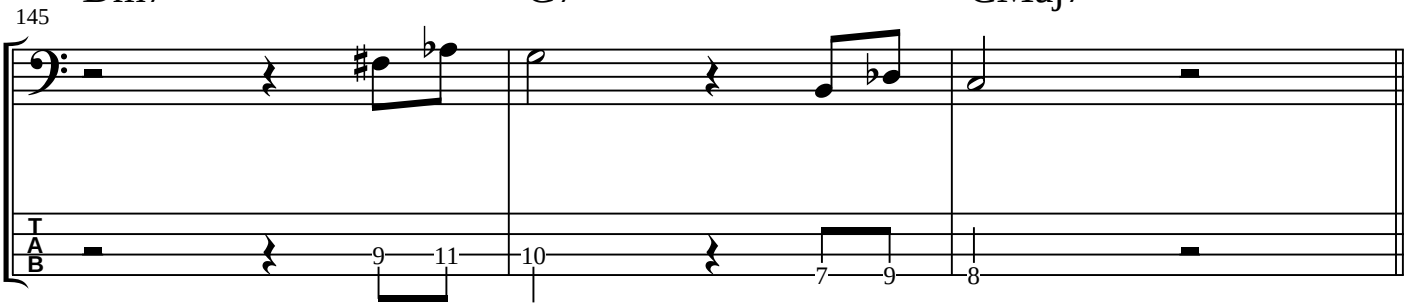
142



Single Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

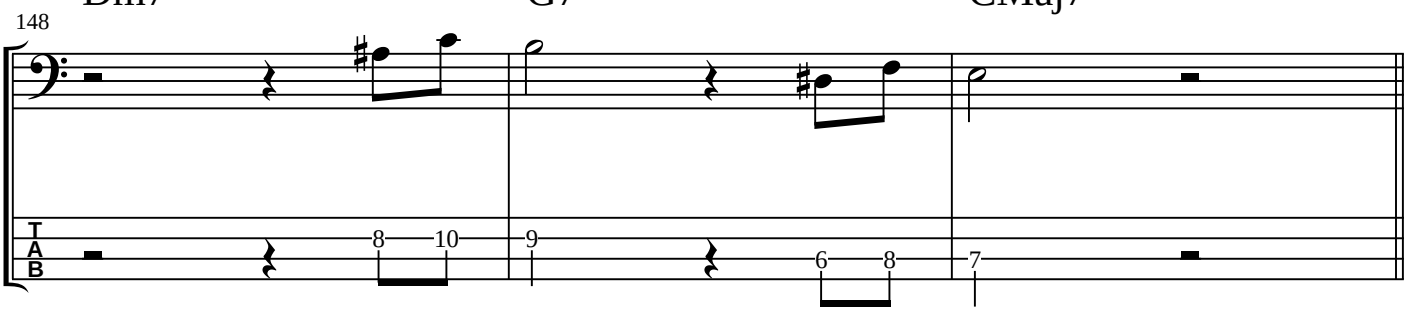
145



Single Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

148



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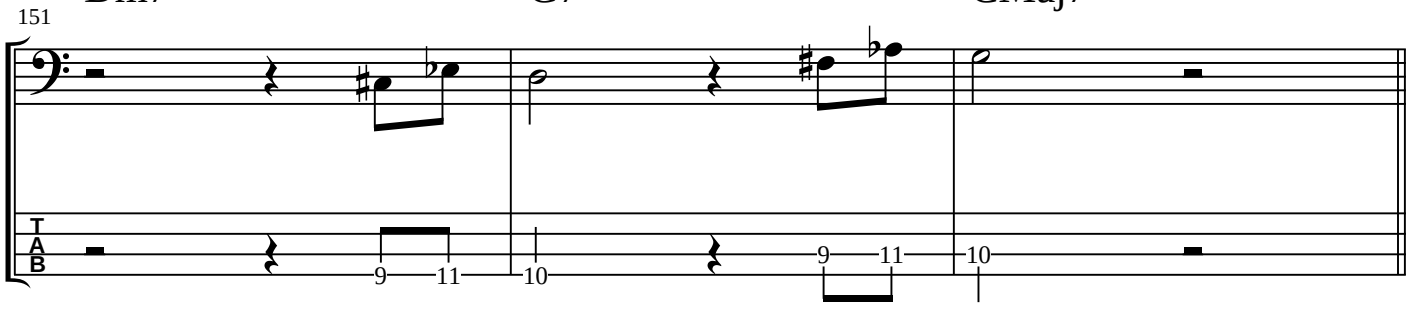
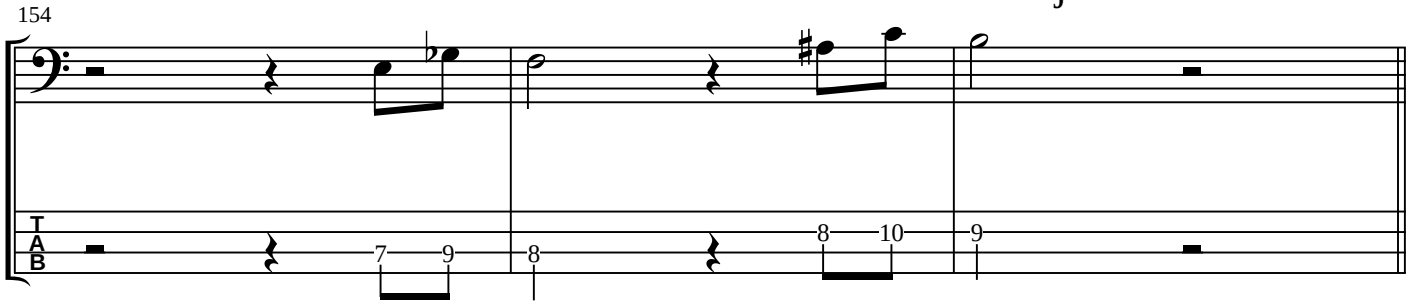


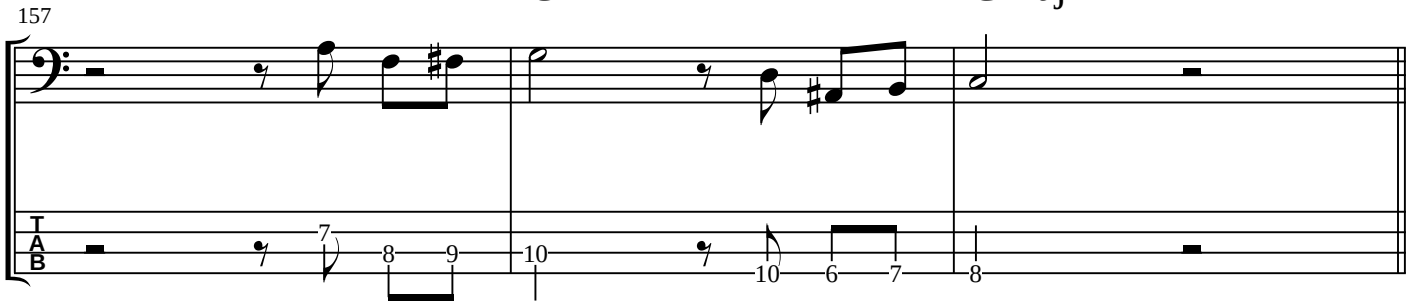
Single Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Above The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



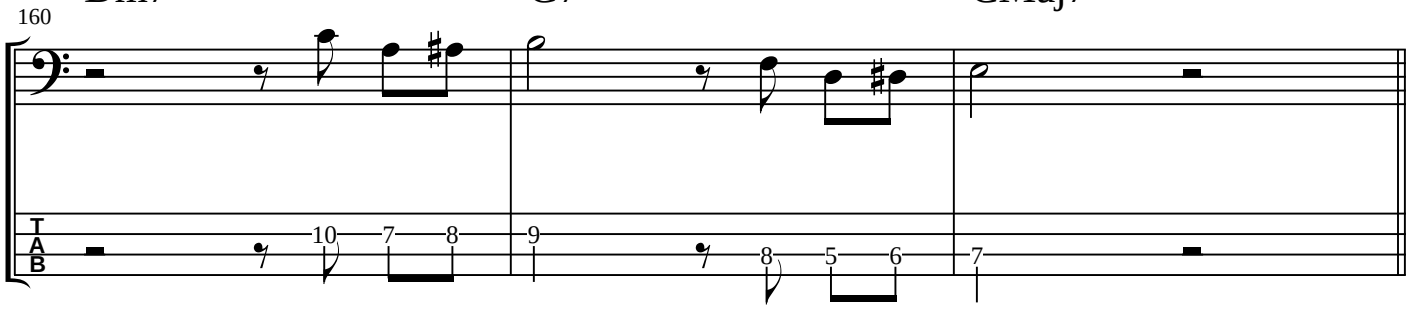
Scalar Approach Above & Double Chromatic Approach Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



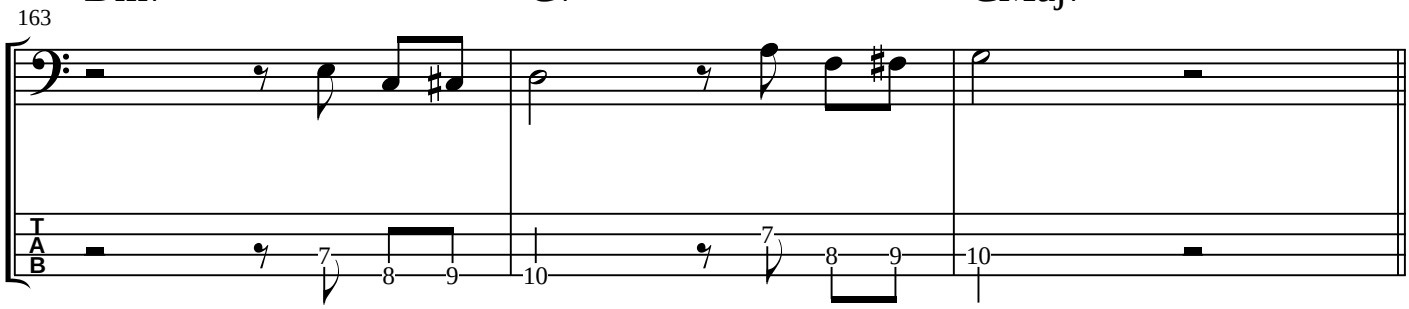
Scalar Approach Above & Double Chromatic Approach Below The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Scalar Approach Above & Double Chromatic Approach Below The 5th

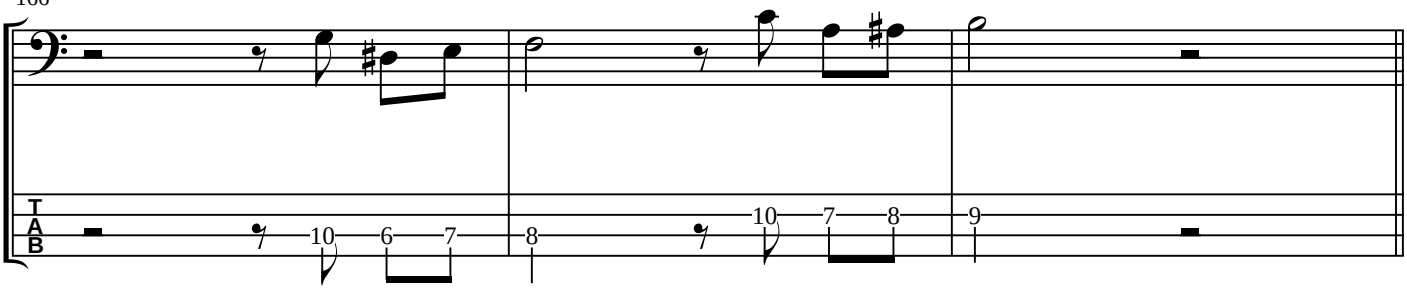
Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Scalar Approach Above & Double Chromatic Approach Below The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

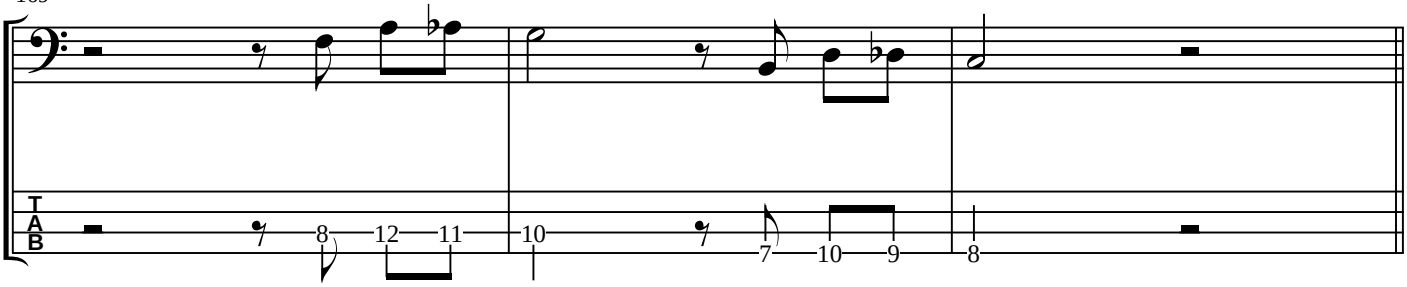
166



Scalar Approach Below & Double Chromatic Approach Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

169



Scalar Approach Below & Double Chromatic Approach Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

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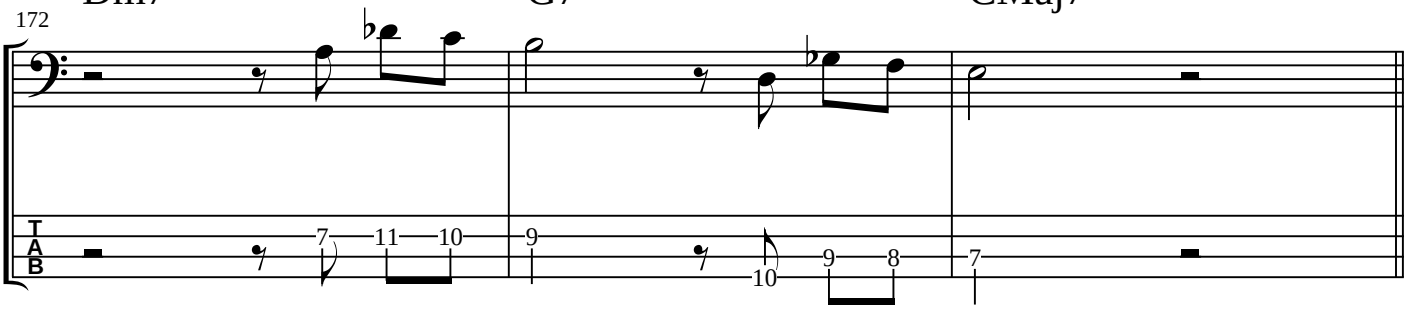

Scalar Approach Below & Double Chromatic Approach Above The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

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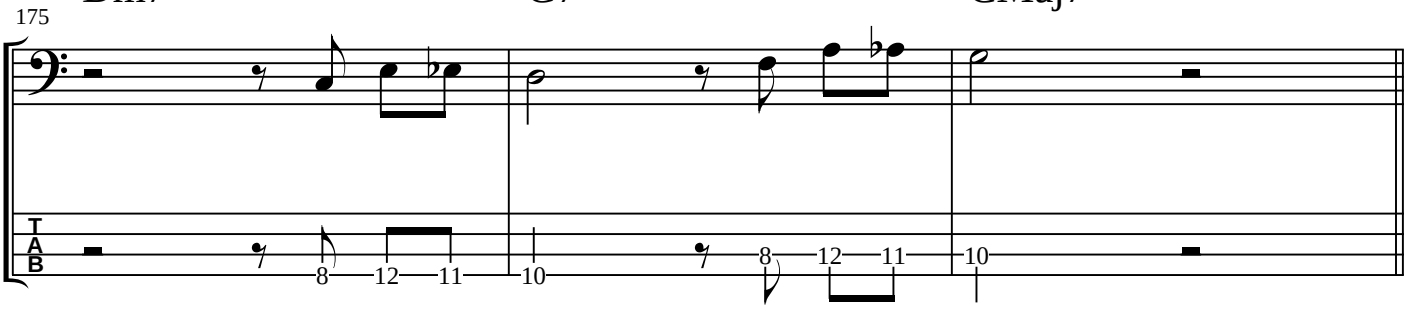

Scalar Approach Below & Double Chromatic Approach Above The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

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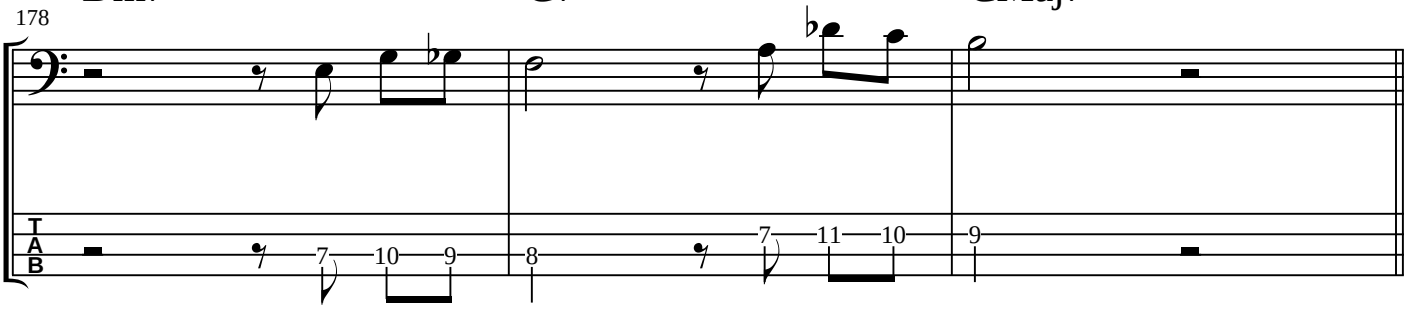
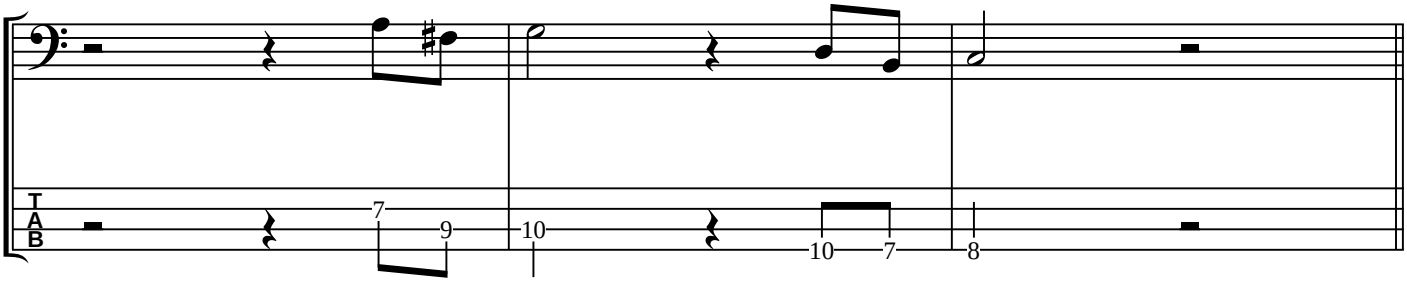


Scalar Approach Above & Single Chromatic Approach Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

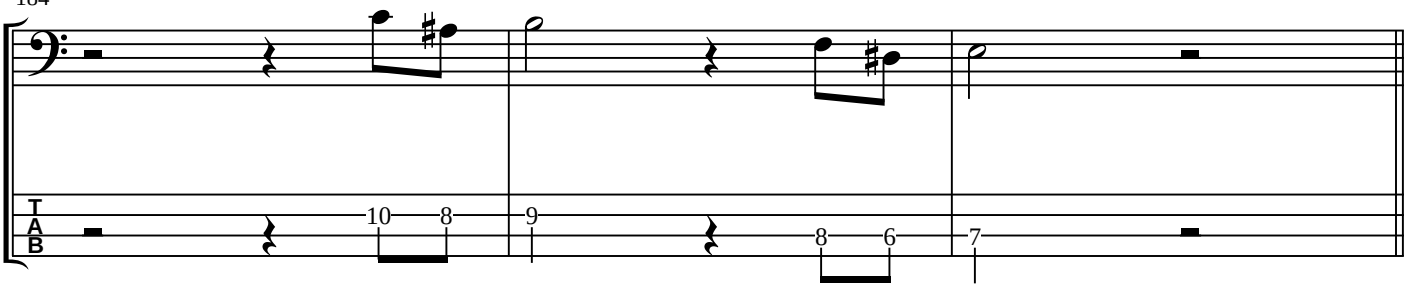
181



Scalar Approach Above & Single Chromatic Approach Below The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

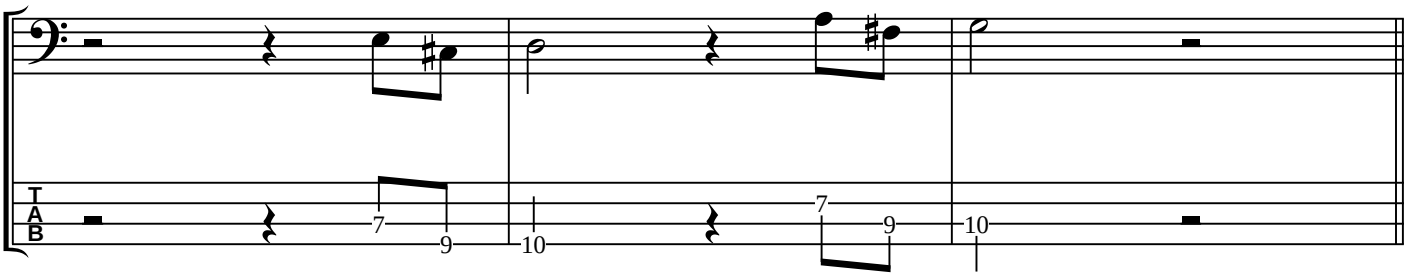
184



Scalar Approach Above & Single Chromatic Approach Below The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

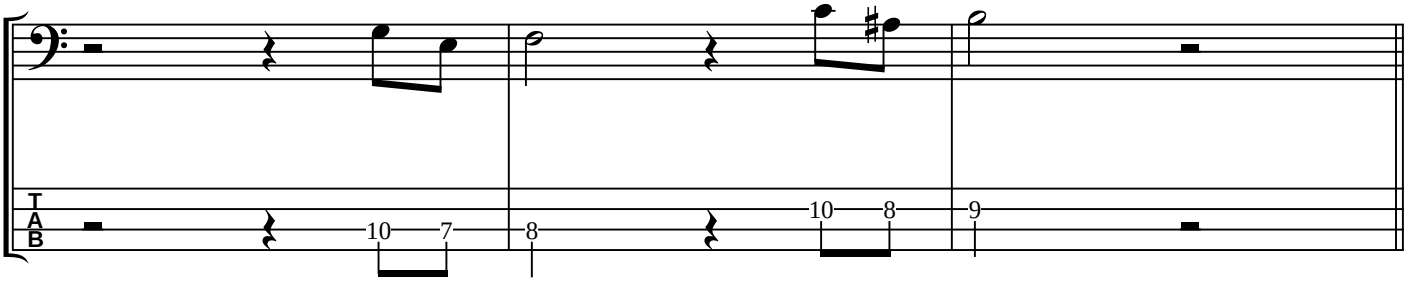
187



Scalar Approach Above & Single Chromatic Approach Below The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

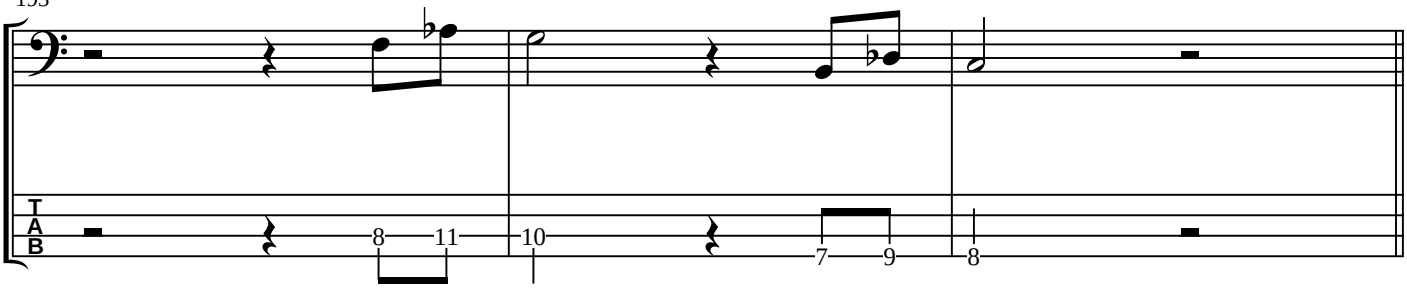
190



Scalar Approach Below & Single Chromatic Approach Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

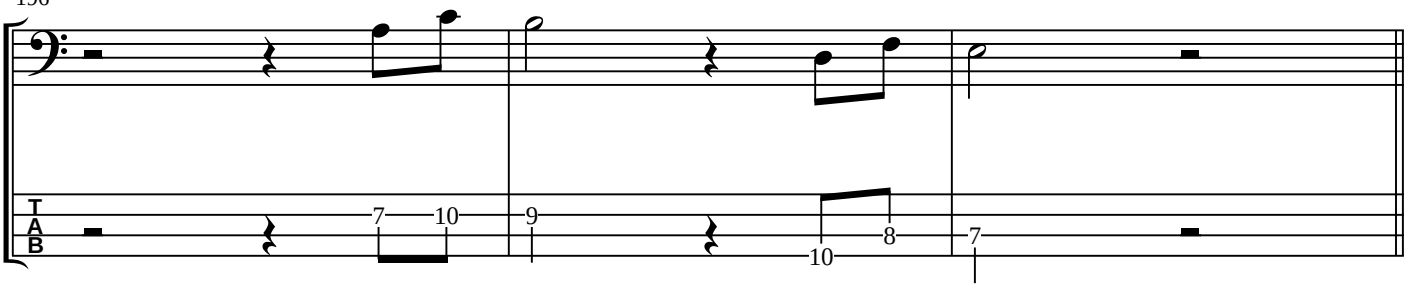
193



Scalar Approach Below & Single Chromatic Approach Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

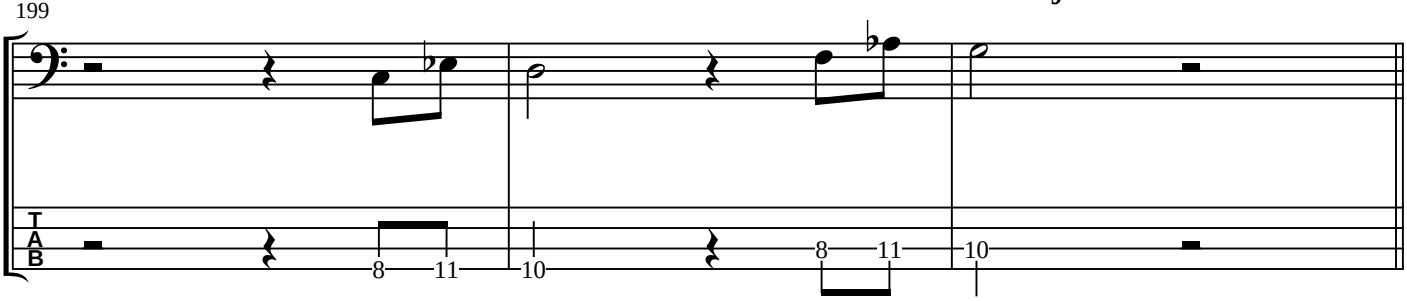
196



Scalar Approach Below & Single Chromatic Approach Above The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

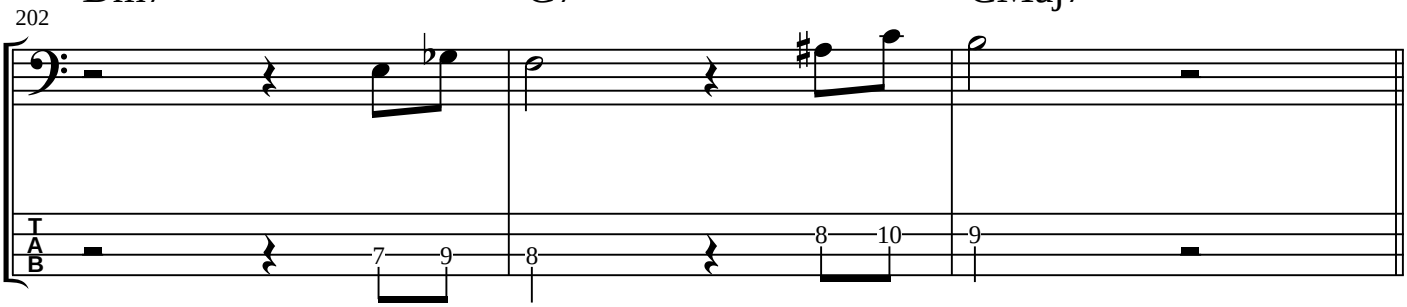
199



Scalar Approach Below & Single Chromatic Approach Above The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

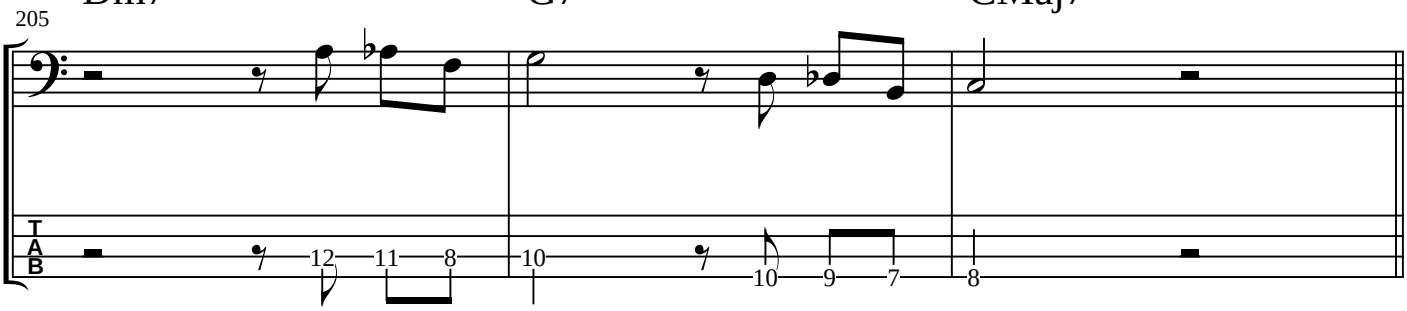
202



Double Chromatic Approach Above & Scalar Approach Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

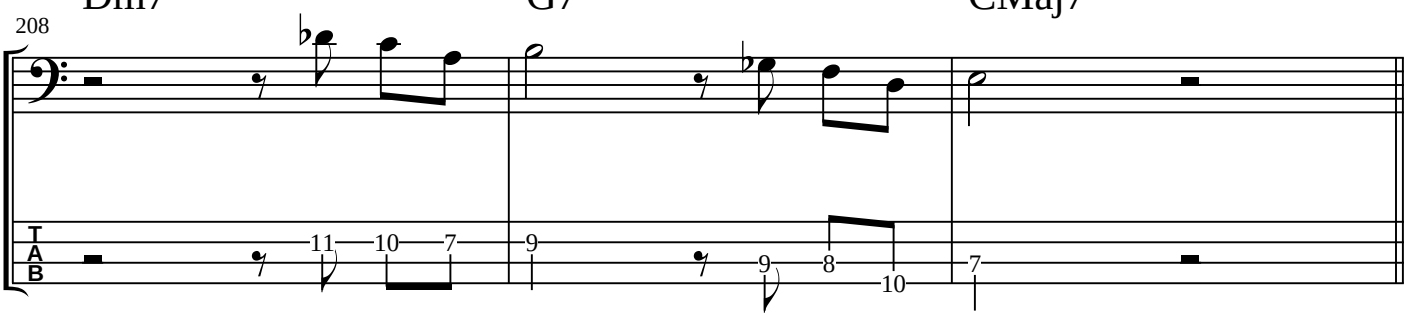
205



Double Chromatic Approach Above & Scalar Approach Below The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

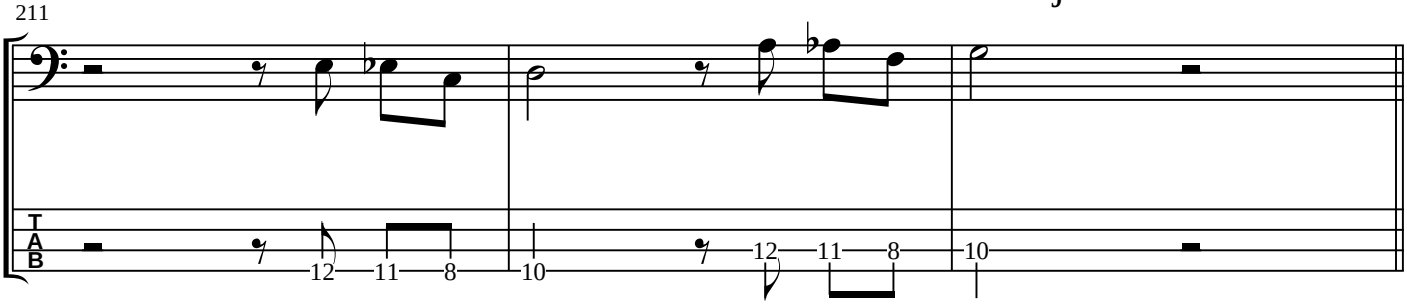
208



Double Chromatic Approach Above & Scalar Approach Below The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

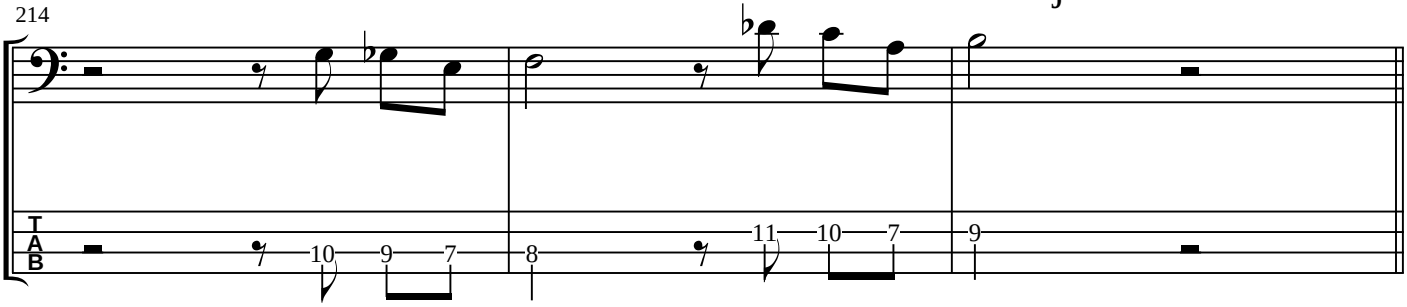
211



Double Chromatic Approach Above & Scalar Approach Below The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

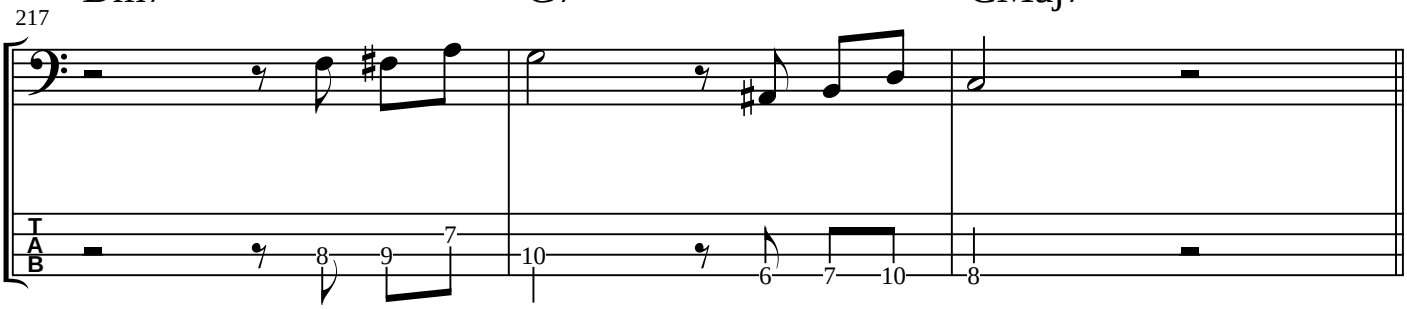
214



Double Chromatic Approach Below & Scalar Approach Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

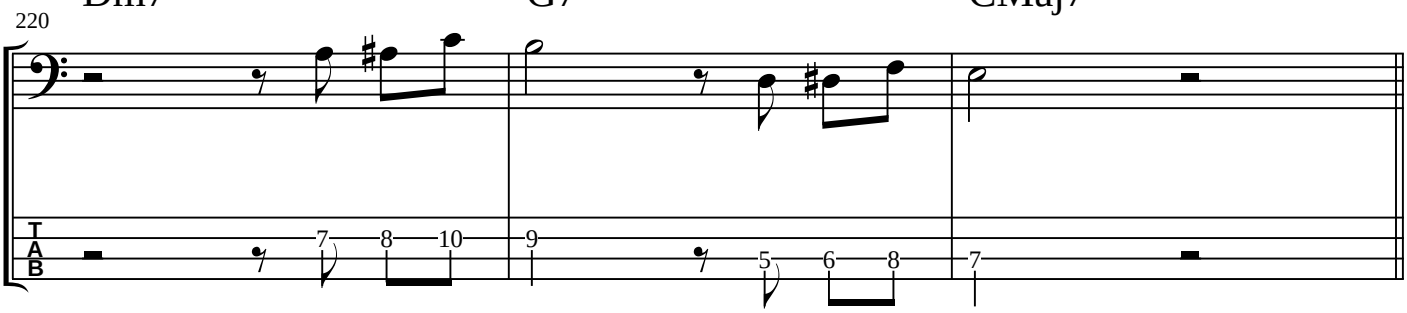
217



Double Chromatic Approach Below & Scalar Approach Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

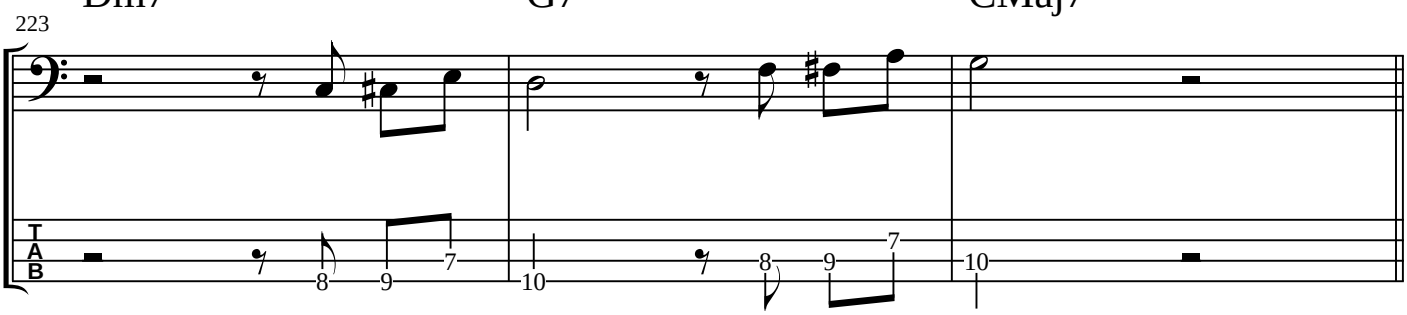
220



Double Chromatic Approach Below & Scalar Approach Above The 5th

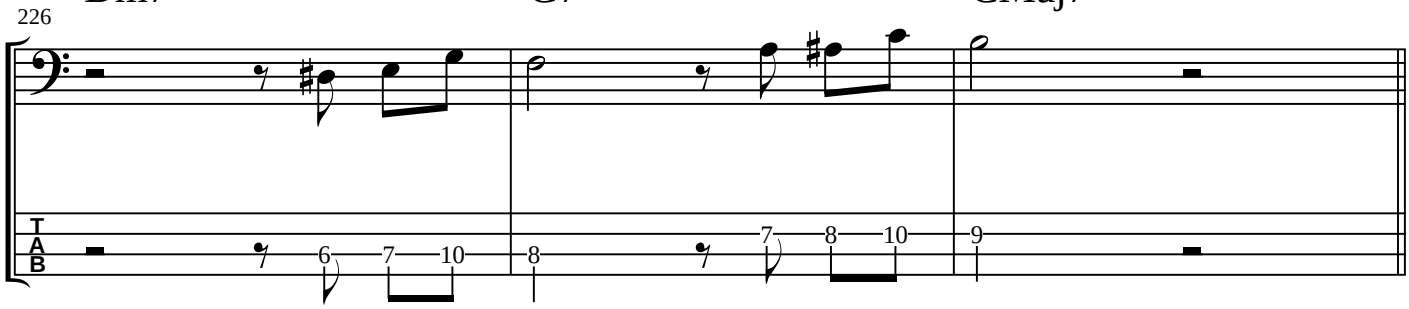
Dm7 G7 CMaj7

223



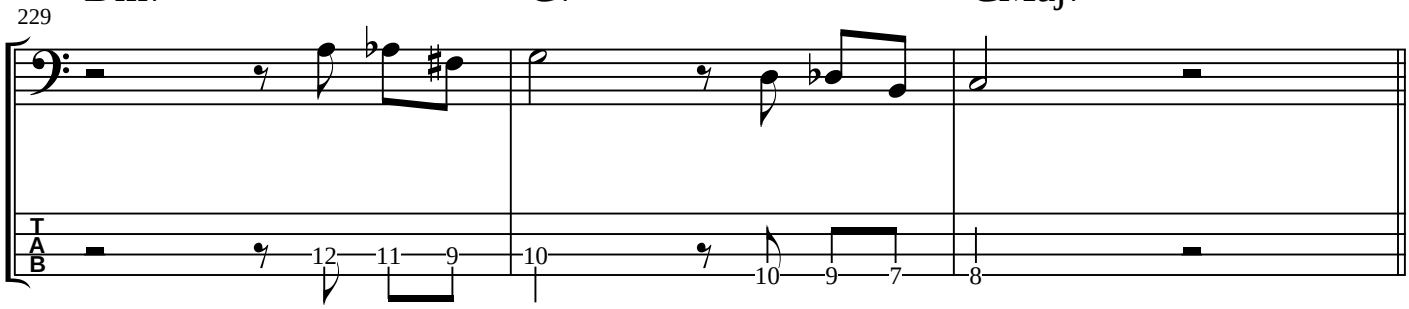
Double Chromatic Approach Below & Scalar Approach Above The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



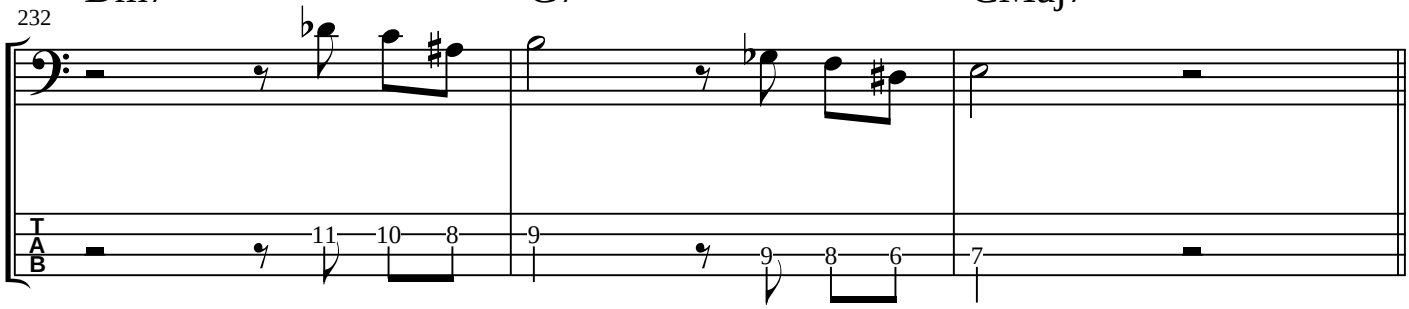
Double Chromatic Approach Above/Single Chromatic Approach Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



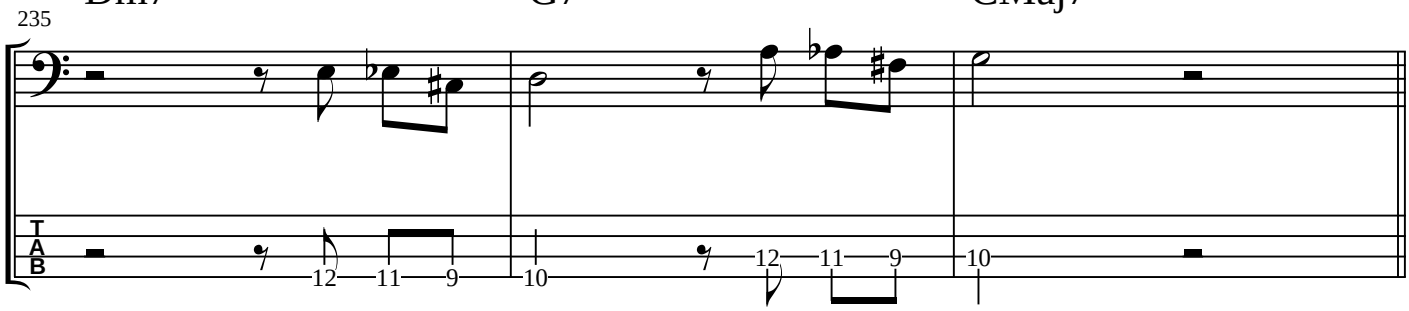
Double Chromatic Approach Above/Single Chromatic Approach Below The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



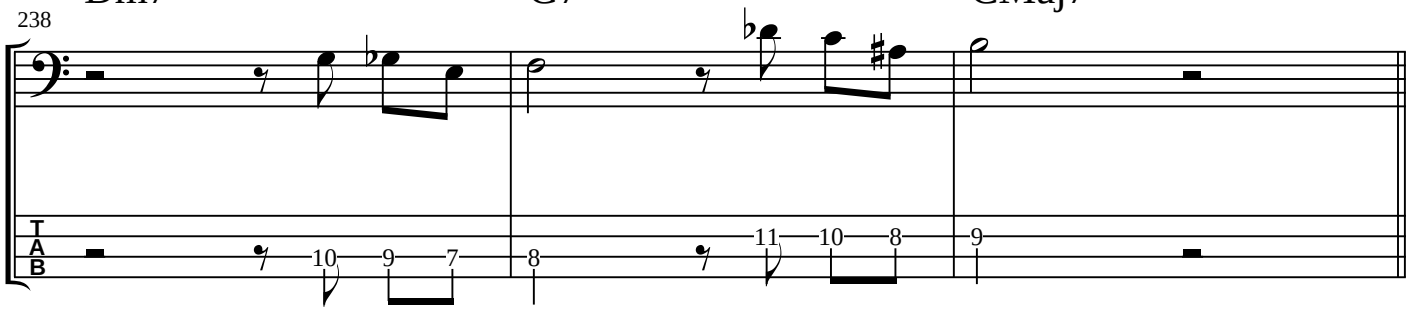
Double Chromatic Approach Above/Single Chromatic Approach Below The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Double Chromatic Approach Above/Single Chromatic Approach Below The 7th

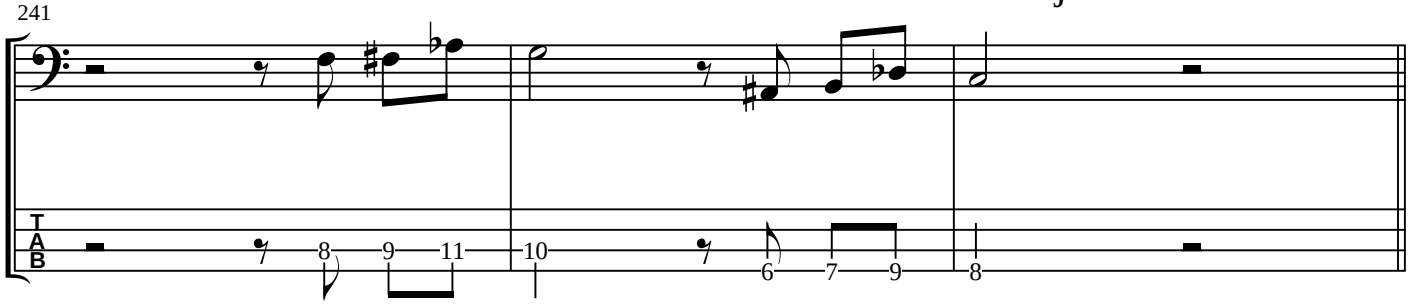
Dm7 G7 CMaj7



Double Chromatic Approach Below/Single Chromatic Approach Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

241



Double Chromatic Approach Below/Single Chromatic Approach Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

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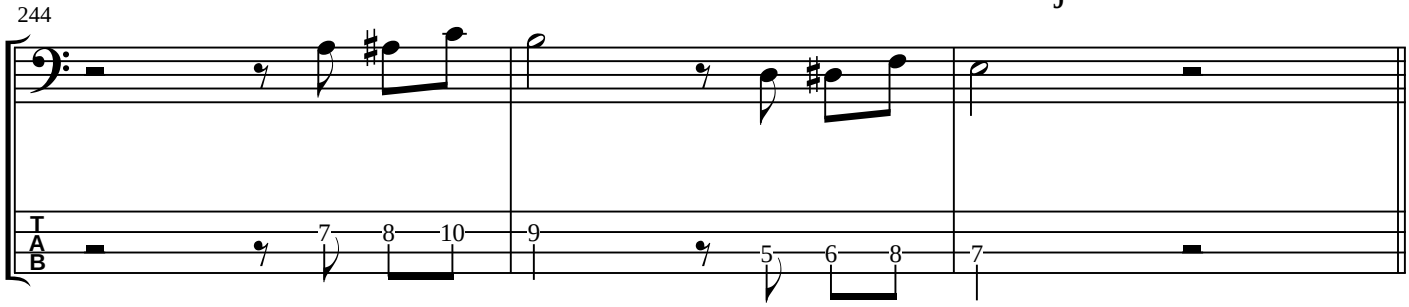
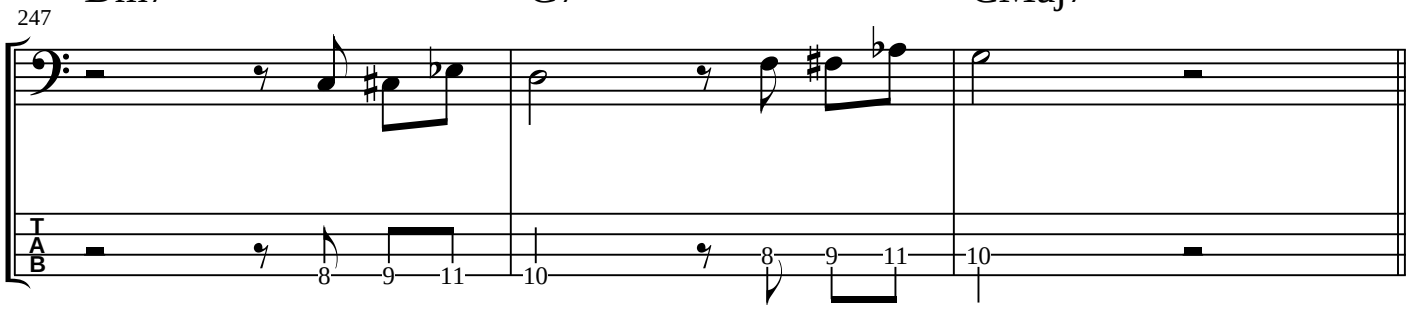


Double Chromatic Approach Below/Single Chromatic Approach Above The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

247



Double Chromatic Approach Below/Single Chromatic Approach Above The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

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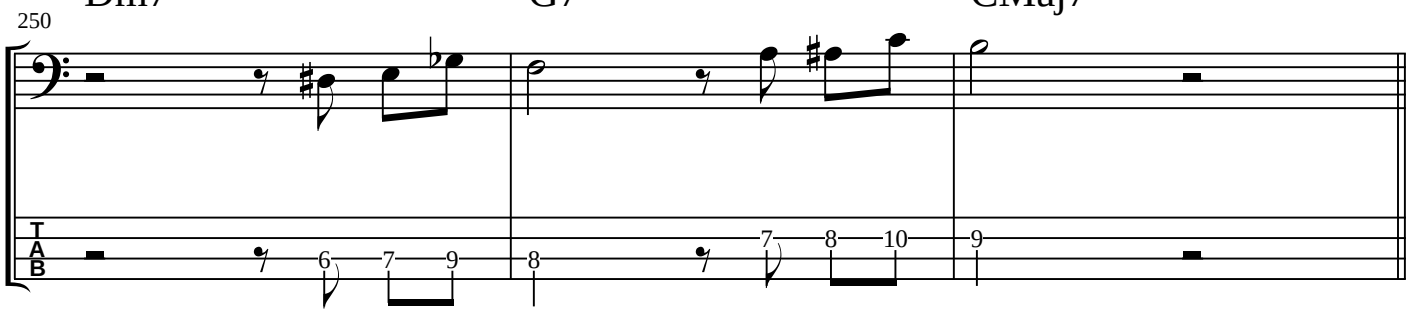
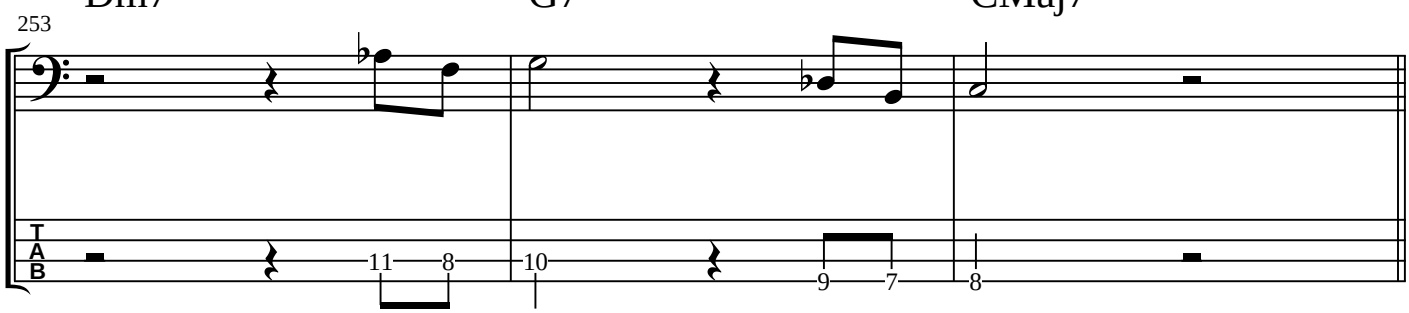


Single Chromatic Approach Above & Scalar Approach Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

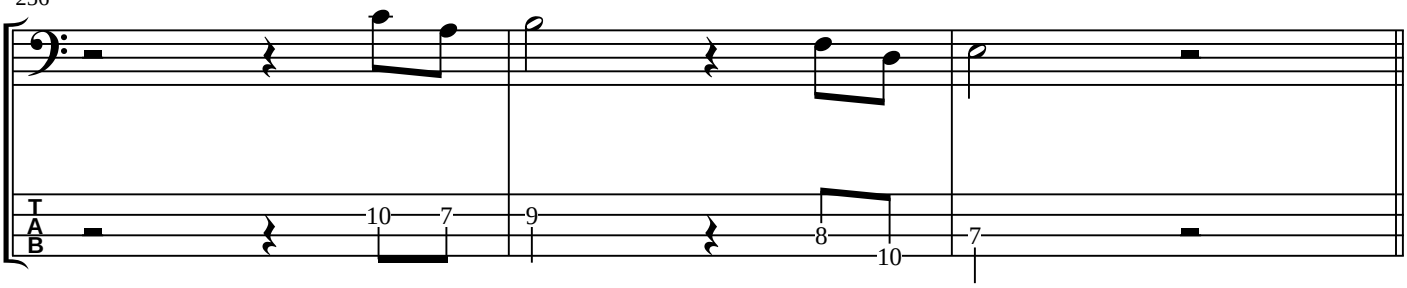
253



Single Chromatic Approach Above & Scalar Approach Below The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

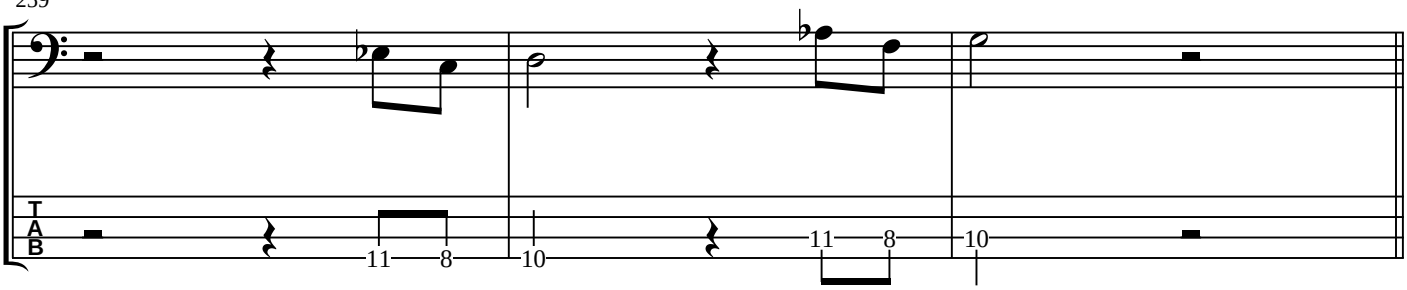
256



Single Chromatic Approach Above & Scalar Approach Below The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

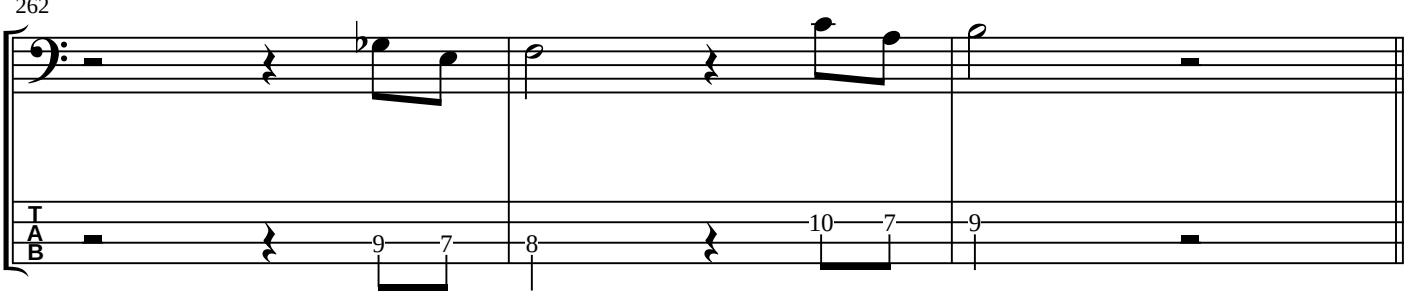
259



Single Chromatic Approach Above & Scalar Approach Below The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

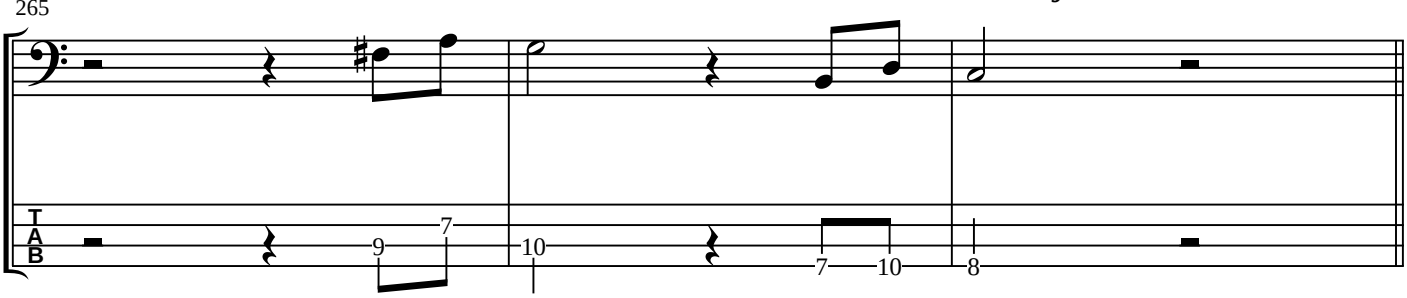
262



Single Chromatic Approach Below & Scalar Approach Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

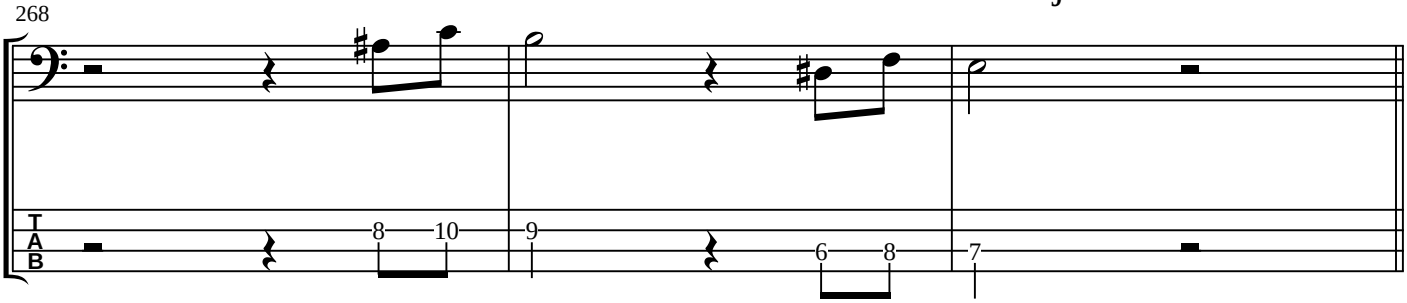
265



Single Chromatic Approach Below & Scalar Approach Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

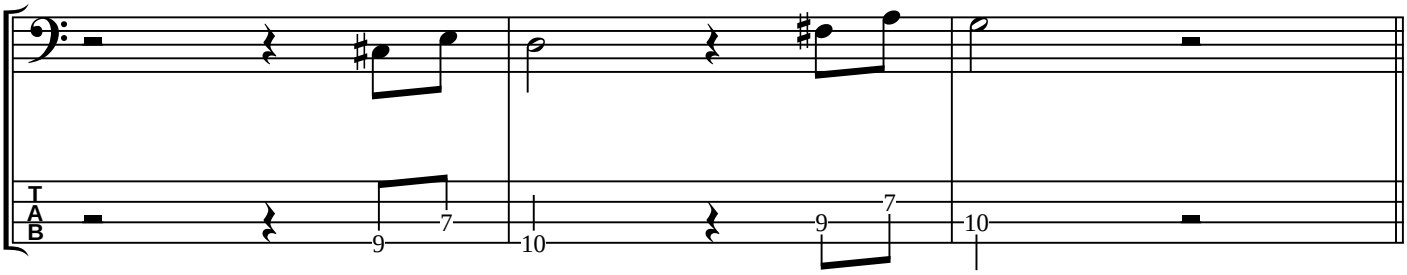
268



Single Chromatic Approach Below & Scalar Approach Above The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

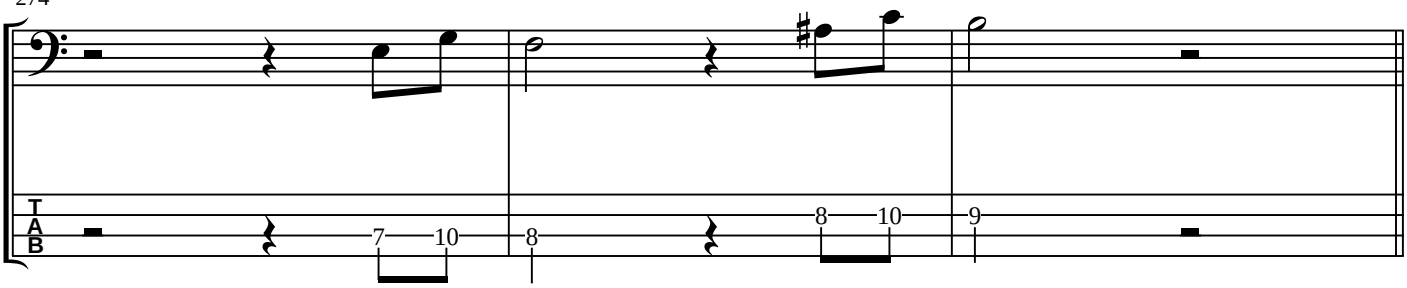
271



Single Chromatic Approach Below & Scalar Approach Above The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

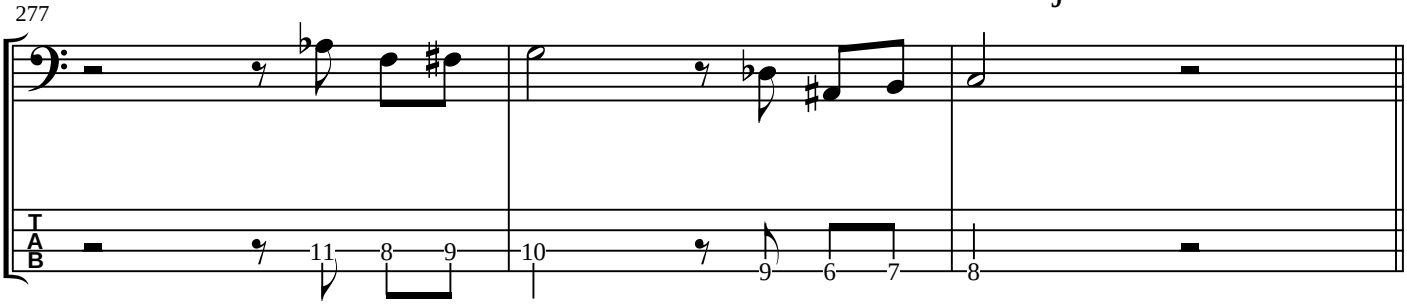
274



Single Chromatic Approach Above/Double Chromatic Approach Below The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

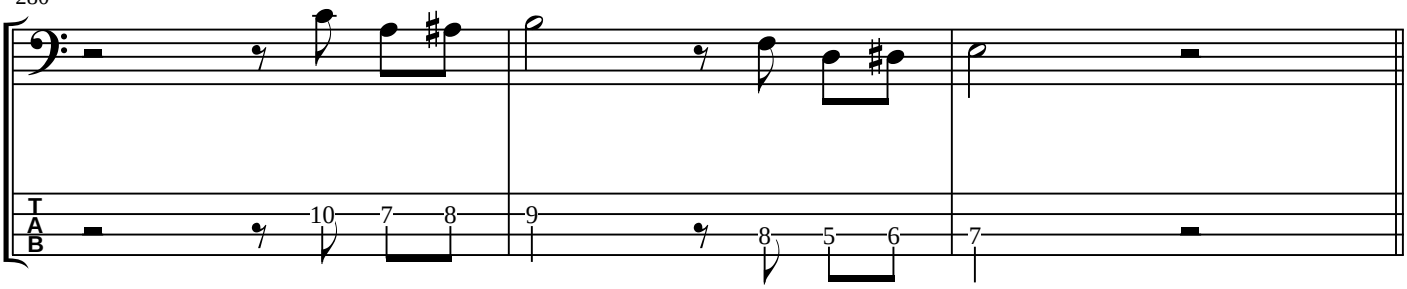
277



Single Chromatic Approach Above/Double Chromatic Approach Below The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

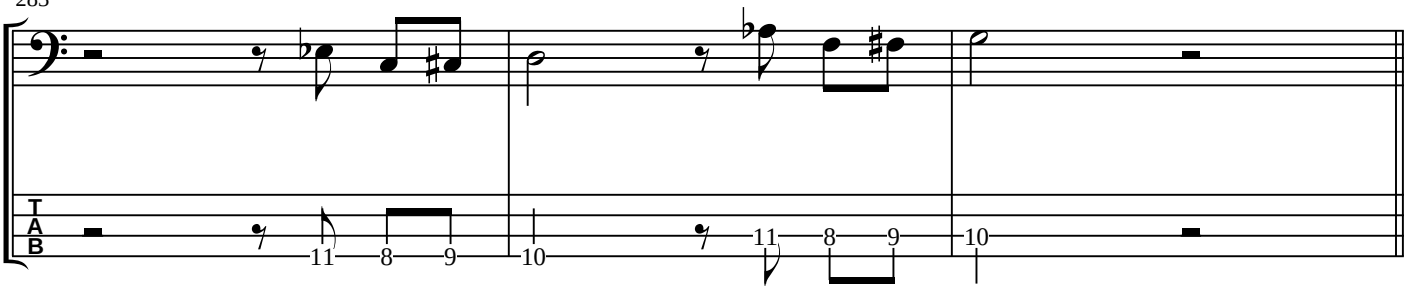
280



Single Chromatic Approach Above/Double Chromatic Approach Below The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

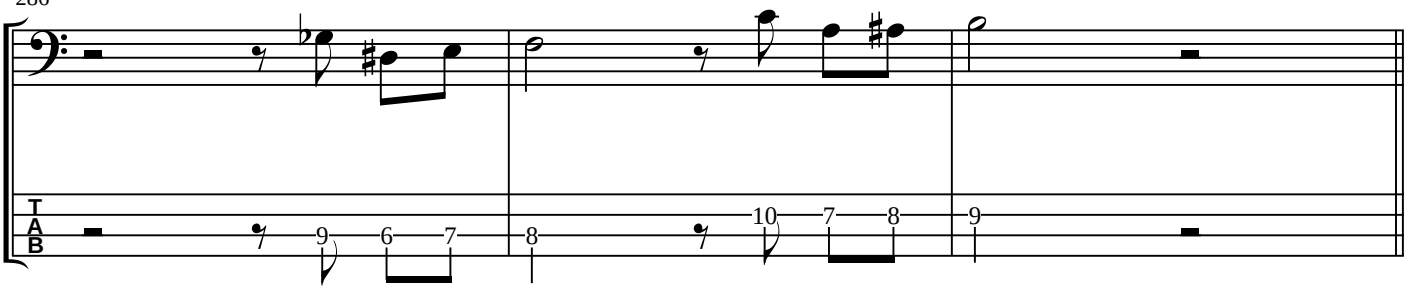
283



Single Chromatic Approach Above/Double Chromatic Approach Below The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

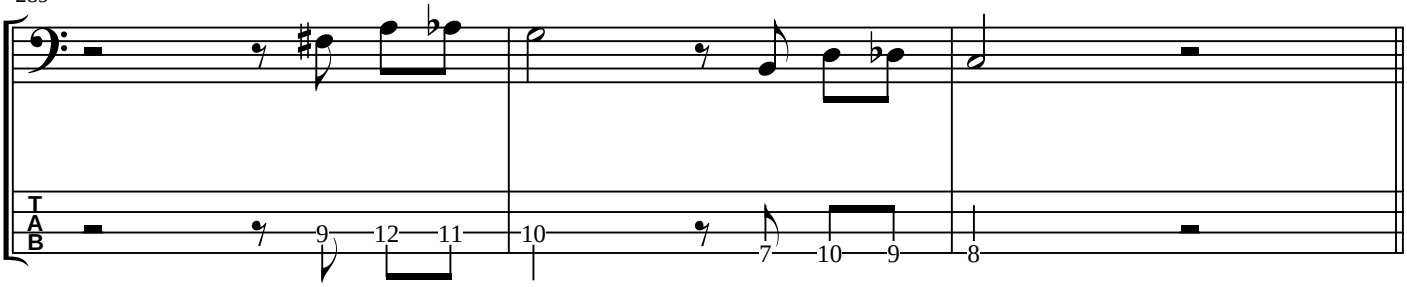
286



Single Chromatic Approach Below/Double Chromatic Approach Above The Root

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

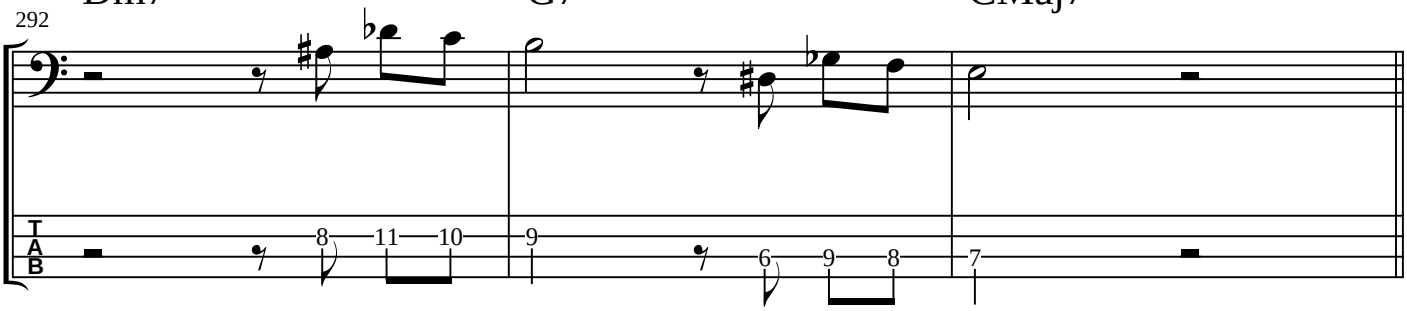
289



Single Chromatic Approach Below/Double Chromatic Approach Above The 3rd

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

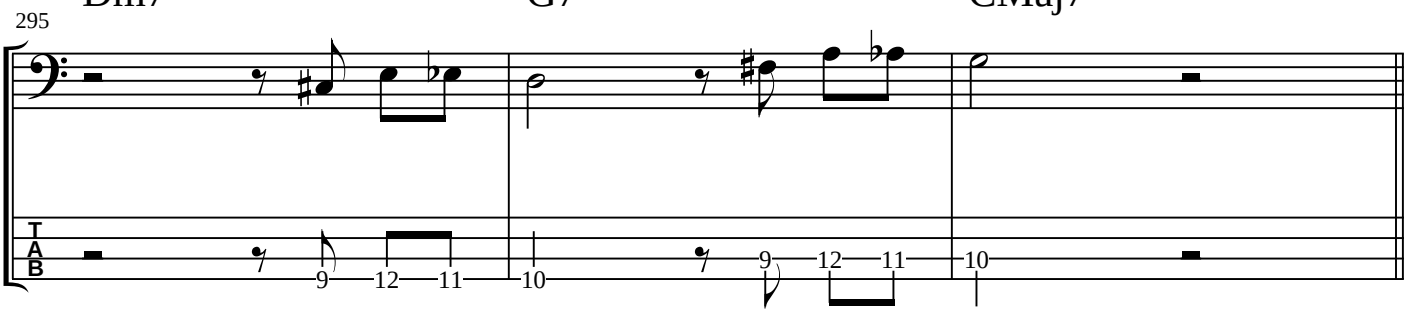
292



Single Chromatic Approach Below/Double Chromatic Approach Above The 5th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

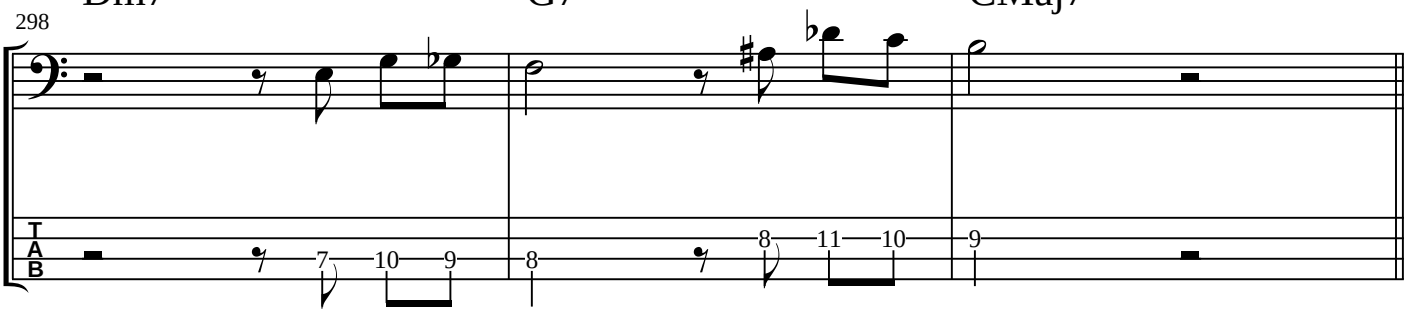
295



Single Chromatic Approach Below/Double Chromatic Approach Above The 7th

Dm7 G7 CMaj7

298



To achieve harmonic clarity when soloing, an improviser may employ a number of techniques. The easiest method of outlining any particular harmonic structure is through the utilization of chordal arpeggiation. While many students feel that playing arpeggiated triads or seventh chords is too obvious or basic to be effective, an analysis of the great solos reveals otherwise. Most of the finest recorded solos can stand alone without the aid of chordal accompaniment because they have so much harmonic strength due to the meticulous placement of chord tones. Since relying solely on chord tones can be too restrictive, soloists will constantly shift the feeling of tension and relaxation in their phrases by combining the usage of chord tones with scale tones and chromatic approach notes.

There are 4 basic techniques an improviser can use to achieve harmonic clarity when soloing.
- Extend the durations of chord tones and make their values longer than non-chord tones.
- Emphasize chord tones by positioning them at significant points in the phrase such as the first note, last note, highest note, or lowest note.
- Place chord tones on the metrically strong downbeats within the measure such as beats 1, 2, 3, or 4.
- Approach chord tones with chromatic ornamentation.

In this lesson, we are going to utilize a combination of all these improvisation techniques to present a clear picture of the harmony. We will use the basic ii-V-I chord progression, the most common harmonic formula found in the jazz repertoire and the basis of numerous jazz standards to demonstrate how you can easily target chord tones on the downbeat of a measure by preceding the root, third, fifth, and seventh with various diatonic and non-diatonic approach note techniques.

Following measures 1-12 which contain one-octave D Dorian, G Mixolydian, and C Ionian modes along with their respective two-octave seventh chord arpeggios, you are presented with 24 different scalar and chromatic combinations which result in a total of 96 distinct permutations over the ii-V-I in C major in measures 13-300.

The 24 scalar and chromatic approach note techniques used in these exercises are listed below.
Scalar Approach Note From Above
Scalar Approach Note From Below
Scalar Approach Notes From Above & Below
Scalar Approach Notes From Below & Above

Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above
Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below
Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Below
Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Above

Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above
Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below
Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above & Below
Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below & Above

Scalar Approach Note From Above & Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below
Scalar Approach Note From Below & Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above
Scalar Approach Note From Above & Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below
Scalar Approach Note From Below & Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above

Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Scalar Approach Note From Below
Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Scalar Approach Note From Above
Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above & Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below
Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below & Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above

Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above & Scalar Approach Note From Below
Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below & Scalar Approach Note From Above
Single Chromatic Approach Note From Above & Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Below
Single Chromatic Approach Note From Below & Double Chromatic Approach Notes From Above

After you have played through each of the notated examples in C major, transpose every exercise to all of the remaining keys such as the ii-V-I in G major, D major, A major, and so forth. Next, practice moving the target tones to different beats within the measure. In jazz music, the downbeats serve as rhythmic points of rest and define the harmony of a phrase while the upbeats supply rhythmic motion. If you assign the chord tone that was originally placed on the first beat of a measure to the fourth beat of the measure that preceded it, the phrase will anticipate the subsequent chord change. Likewise, if you appoint the target tone that was initially found on the first beat of a measure to the second beat, the phrase will imply a delayed resolution. You can also shift the target tones just a half of a beat earlier or later in the measure as well. There are countless variations that can be generated by exploiting the concept of rhythmic displacement, and as you experiment with the positioning of target tones, you will notice that the harmonic character of the phrase will begin to change. Although the underlying motion of tension and release can be greatly intensified by simply relocating target tones, the harmonic clarity of the phrases will become more ambiguous as the target tones continue to deviate from the metrically strong beats. Once you feel comfortable targeting chord tones with these scalar and chromatic approach note techniques over the ii-V-I chord progression, expand this improvisation concept by applying it to other changes and improvise solos using these techniques on jazz standards.