BLUE MONK

Performance Notes

Recorded Sources:

Thelonious Monk Trio, OJC-010

Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers with Thelonious Monk, Atlantic 1278 (LP)

Thelonious in Action, OJC-1013

Alone in San Francisco, OJC-231

Tokyo Concerts, Columbia 38610 (LP)

"Blue Monk" was recorded ten times between 1954 and 1965. It is one of his best known and most commonly played twelve-bar blues compositions. Like "Monk's Dream," the title uses the composer's name. A number of Monk's tunes have titles that refer to himself, family members, or places he frequented.

Measures 1-3: The B♭ bass in measure 1 can be played with the third finger, as the first and second fingers play the ascending thirds. The last third in the sequence (D-F) may be played with a full first-finger barre at the sixth fret, allowing easy access to the B♭ and A♭ on beat 4. For measure 2, you can use the same fingering, moved to the eighth position. As an alternative, the low B♭ on beat 1 can be played with the fourth finger; however, as the melody moves higher it may be difficult to sustain the B♭ for its full time value.

Measure 3: On beat 1, the high F and the B♭ bass can be played with a first-finger barre, as the second finger plays the D. The second third in the sequence, E♭-G, can be played by a barre with the third finger.

Measure 4: The notation suggests the A-C♯ major third be played with the second and third fingers, requiring you to release the B♭ bass and shift down to play the A♭-C♮. The alternate fingering uses the thumb to play the B♭ bass note; this approach allows more flexibility to play the melody and creates a smoother, more sustained, bass line.

Measure 6: The thirds can be played on the B and G strings using the second and third fingers for the first third, and the third and fourth fingers for the ascending thirds in the sequence. You may want to experiment with other fingering combinations that suit your own style.

Measure 7: Variations of this phrase recur throughout the piece. The low F in the triplet on beat 1 was not always played on Monk's recorded versions of this tune (see measure 4). When the F was used, it was held for varying time values, thus there are different fingerings for this phrase that are more or less interchangeable. Barre with the first finger to play the low F♮.

Measure 8: Hammer on the C♯ to D on beat 4. Notice the rhythmic variations of this phrase in measure 20, and in measure 8 of the alternate chorus; they are transcribed from various recordings of the song.

Measures 13-14: Note the added fifth and the flatted seventh of the B♭7 and E♭7 chords in each measure.

Measure 15: The fingering from the low E (notated as F♭) to the A-C♯ third is awkward, but it allows you to make a smooth transition to the B♭ triad with the bass on the sixth string. As an alternative, the A-C♯ third could be played with a barre on the second fret, and the B♭ triad played with the root on the 5th string. You may want to explore other fingerings for this passage that suit your individual style.

Measure 16: The A♭ on beat 2 is an eighth note and should be quickly muted while the other chord tones are held for their full time value. The A♭ can be muted by quickly lifting the third finger. Be careful to keep the string muted so there is no pull-off sound.

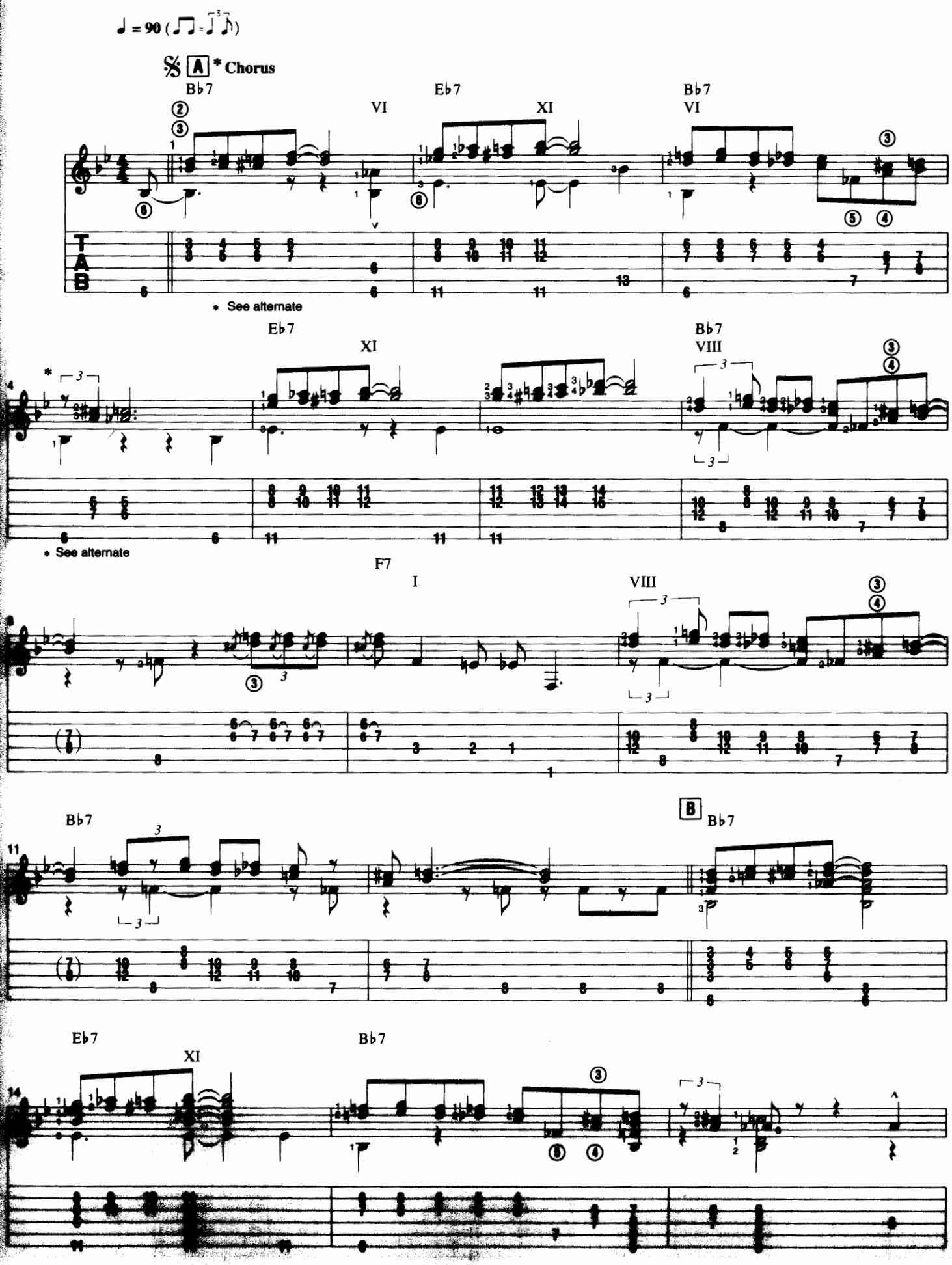
Measure 18: This phrase first appeared in measure 6. The last three notes are Monk's fills, not melody notes.

Measure 21: Everything after beat 1 is Monk's improvised fills.

Alternate chorus: This reharmonization of the main theme creates a different texture by voicing the melody in sixths. (This technique is repeated in measures 5-6.)

Blue Monk

By Thelonious Monk



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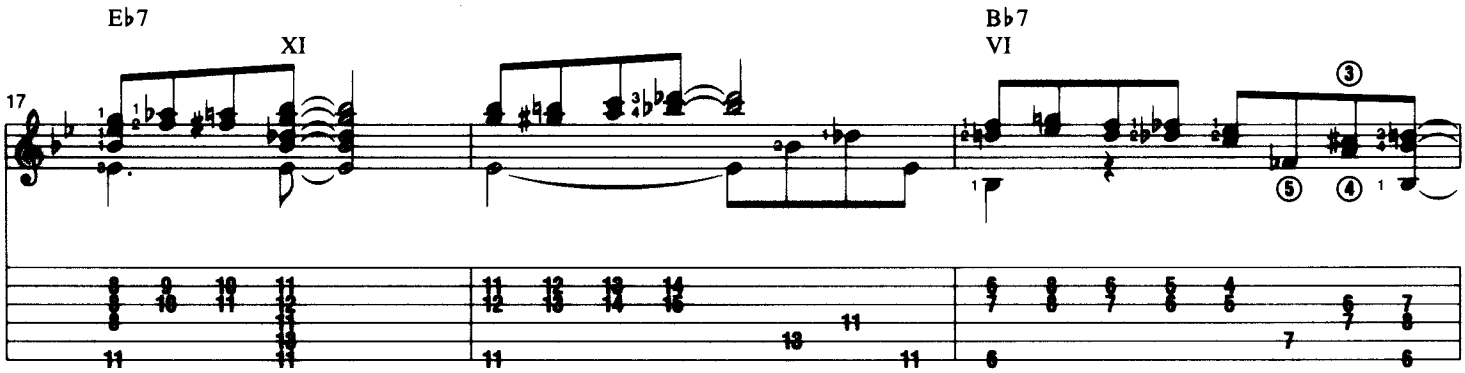
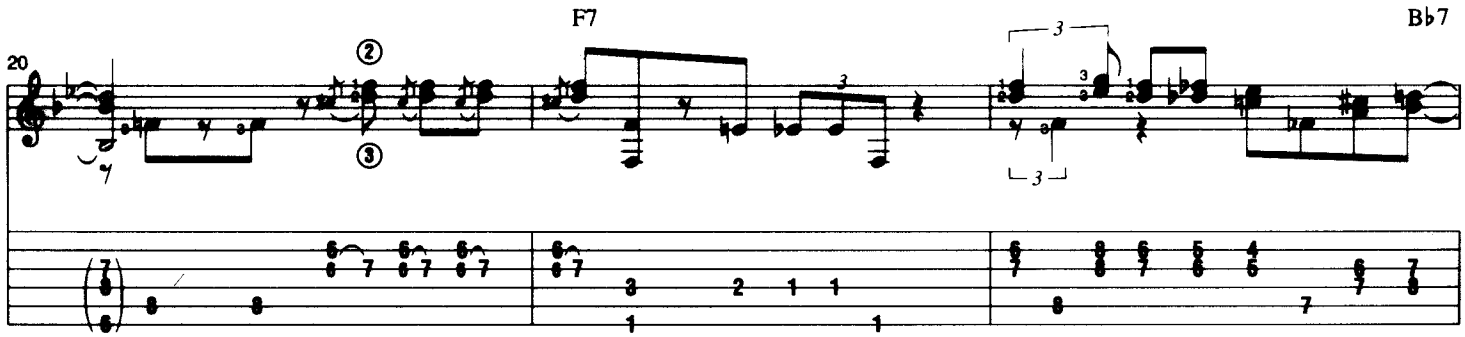
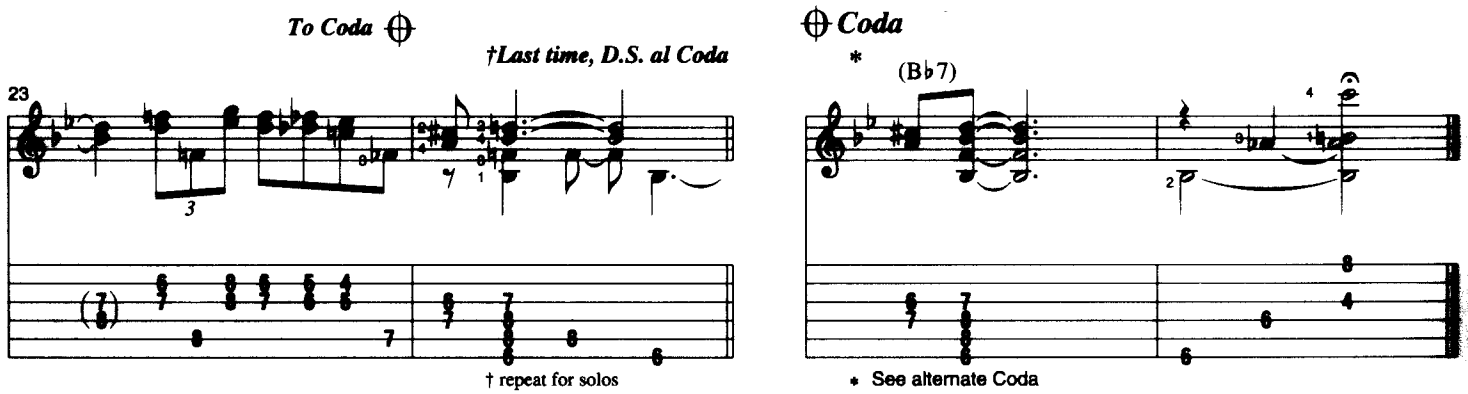
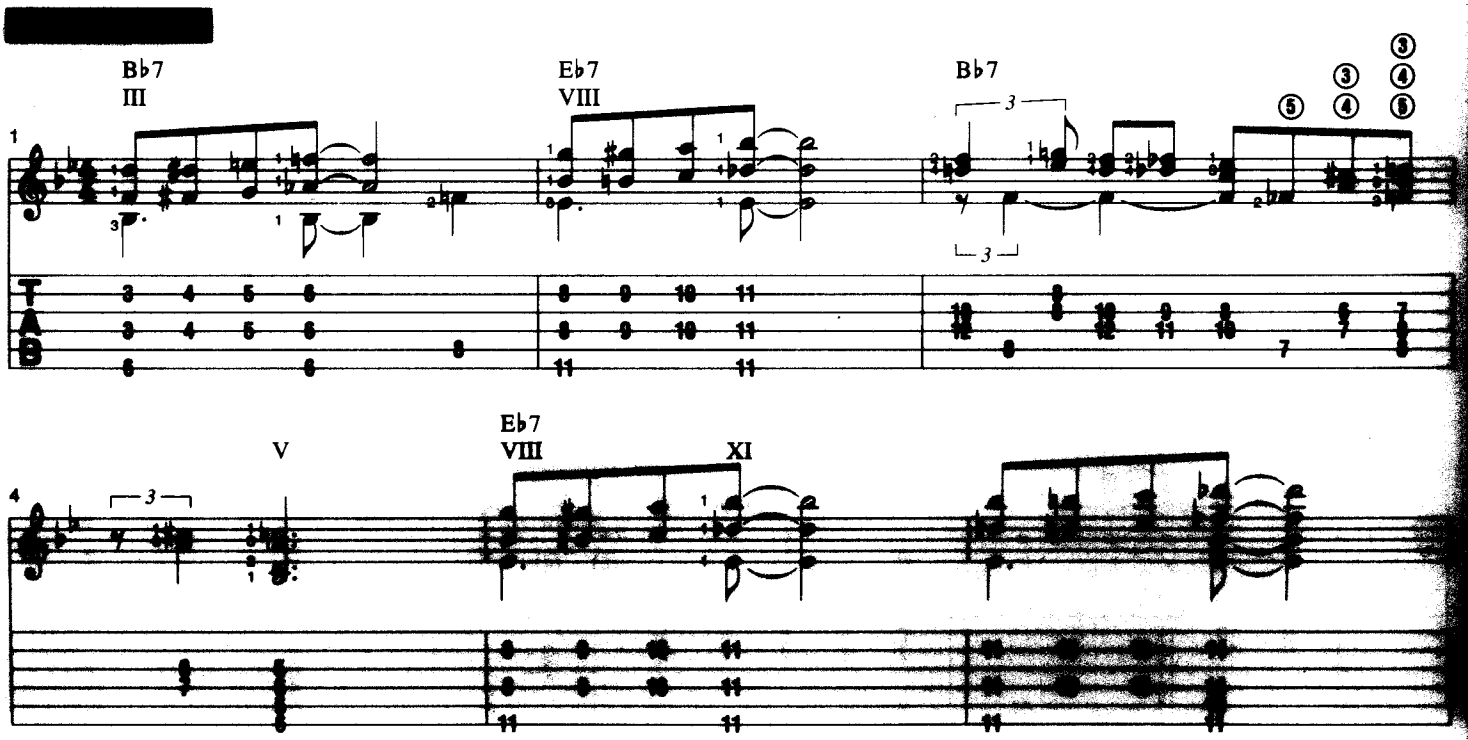
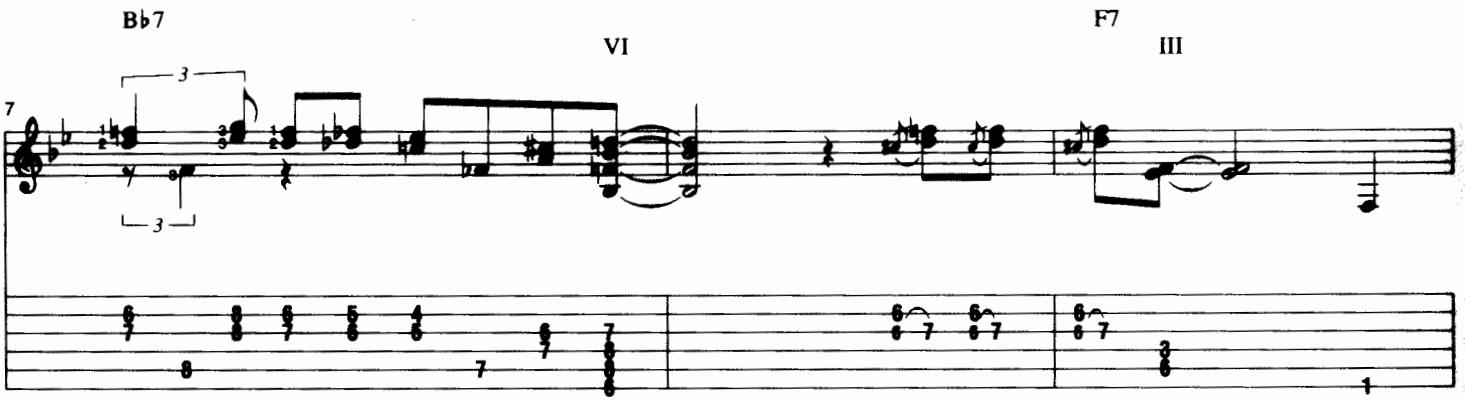
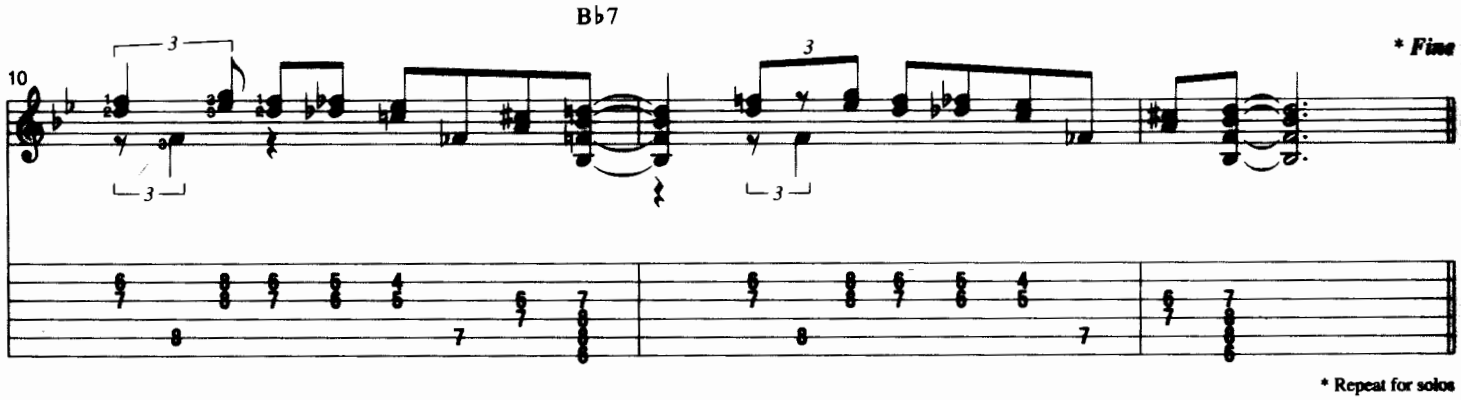

E♭7
XI
B♭7
VI
17


F7
B♭7
20

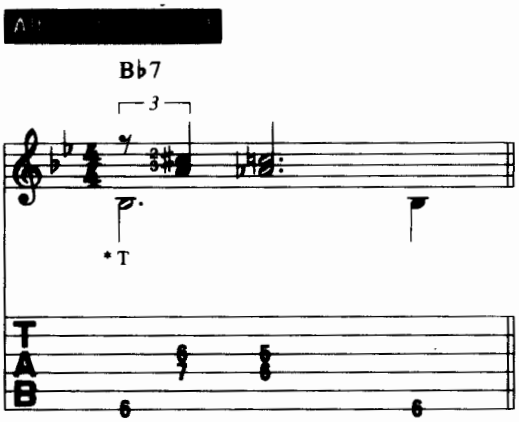
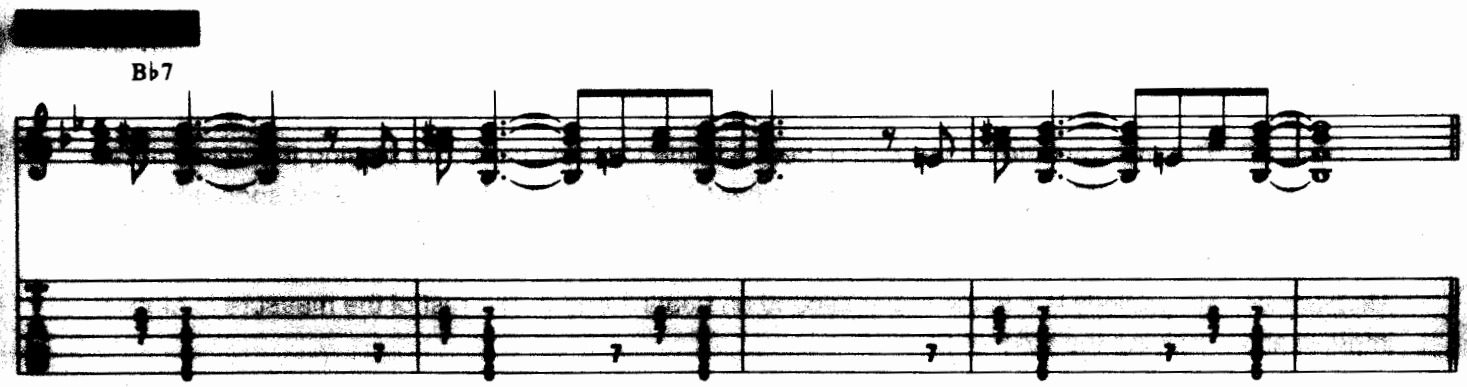

To Coda
†Last time, D.S. al Coda
23
† repeat for solos
Coda
*
(B♭7)
* See alternate Coda


B♭7
III
E♭7
VIII
B♭7
1
V
E♭7
VIII
XI
4





* Repeat for solos



* T = Thumb on (6)