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A Practical Approach to the Arranging of Popular Music

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A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO THE ARRANGING OF POPULAR MUSIC

BY

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I.

Introduction

This study will offer a practical and methodical approach to the arranging of popular music. An arrangement shall herein refer to "a harmonized setting, whether for voices or instruments, of an existing melody."[1] Since there is no universally accepted definition of popular music, in this study the term will refer to jazz, rock, Latin-American, Broadway, or motion picture styles, although the methods discussed may apply to any style.

A knowledge of functional harmony, key signatures, intervals, and the notation of rhythm and pitch is assumed. The arranger should also be familiar with chord symbols.*

Each arranging exercise will begin from a 'lead sheet.' The term 'lead sheet' refers to the melody, chord symbols, and text of a given composition.

This study deals with various techniques concerning part-writing, and variations of harmonic and rhythmic factors.

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[1]Westrup, J. A. and F. Ll. Harrison, The New College Encyclopedia of Music, W. W. Norton, New York, 1960.

*See Appendix

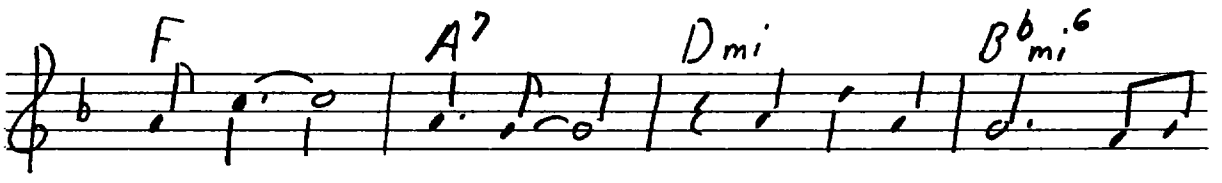
II.

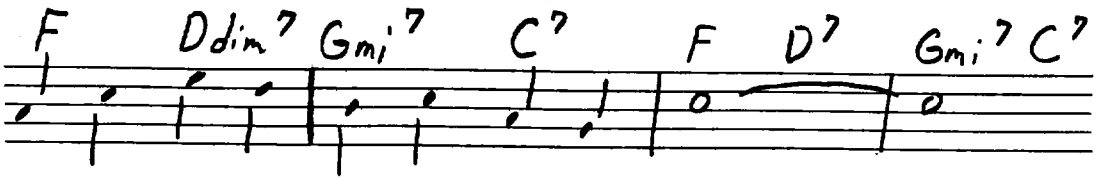
Harmonic Variants

Frequently, the harmonizations found on a lead sheet are simple sketches of a suggested harmonic framework. To the listener, these harmonizations may sound elementary and become extremely monotonous. For the sake of harmonic interest, it is sometimes advisable for the arranger to alter the existing harmonies. Herein will be discussed several ways in which to accomplish harmonic alterations.

The ultimate criteria for harmonic alterations is the appropriateness of the harmony to the melody. In an arrangement, the melody is a given entity subject only to slight alterations. For this reason, the methods of harmonic alterations presented here may be used only if they are appropriate to the melody.

The examples in this chapter will be taken from "Georgia On My Mind," hereafter abbreviated as "Georgia." A lead sheet of the first eight measures of "Georgia" is shown below. The reader may wish to refer to it periodically.



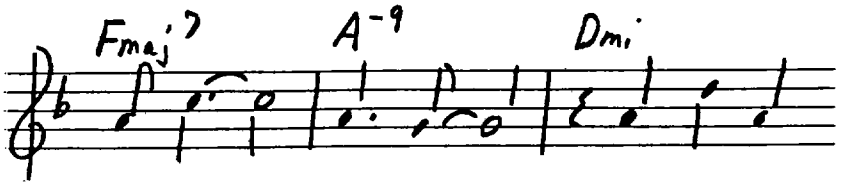


The first technique is to superimpose additional thirds to a given chord. The most common addition is the seventh, which may be added to any chord. The ninth may be added to any chord except the mediant and the subtonic, and in a minor key, the supertonic, as these chords are not commonly found in popular music. An eleventh is rarely added to any chord other than the supertonic in a major key, and a thirteenth is rarely added to any chord other than the dominant in either a major or minor key. A sixth is occasionally added to the tonic and subdominant in a major key.

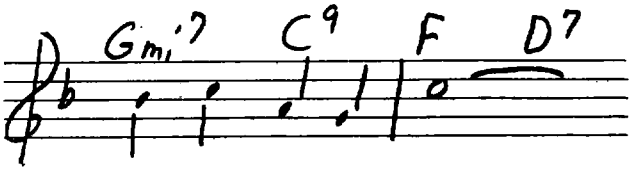
Sevenths, ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths may be added to the given chords for the sake of varying the harmonic colors. The added tones must, however, conform to the key and function of the given chord. In the second bar of "Georgia" a ninth may be added to the $\underline{A}^7$ chord as in example 1a. Because $\underline{A}^7$ functions as a dominant of the following D minor chord, the added ninth should be a B-flat (from the D minor scale) rather than B-natural.

In the sixth bar, a ninth may be added to the C^7 chord, as in example 1b. Because the C^7 functions as a dominant of the following F major chord, the ninth used should be from the F major scale (a D-natural).

example 1a. "Georgia," measures 1-3.



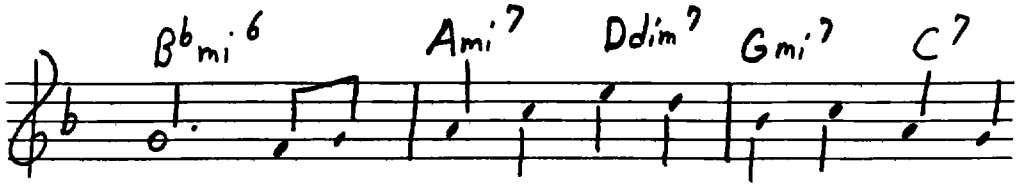
example 1b. "Georgia," measures 6-7.



The second technique is to replace a chord by another chord of the same harmonic function. The concept of functional harmony stipulates that the tonic, mediant, and submediant chords in a given key serve a tonic function (chords of rest). The mediant, dominant, and subtonic chords serve a dominant function (unstable, leading to a tonic-function chord), and the supertonic, subdominant, and submediant chords serve a subdominant function (unstable, yet not tense). It is important to note that the mediant chord serves either a tonic or a dominant function and the submediant chord serves a tonic or a subdominant function. The function of the mediant and submediant is determined by the context in which they are used.

A chord may be replaced by another chord of the same harmonic function. In the key of F major, the I chord (F major) and the III chord (A minor) both serve a tonic function. In bar five of "Georgia," the F major chord may be replaced by an A minor chord, or, using the previous technique, by an A minor^{7} chord as in example 2.

example 2. "Georgia," measures 4-6.

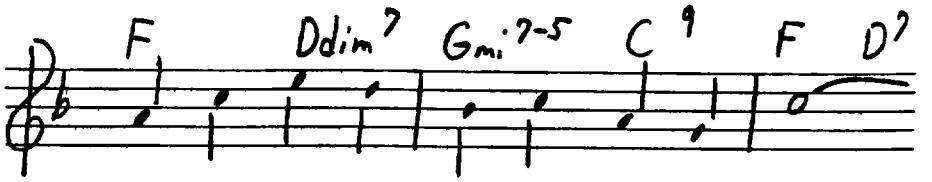


A third technique concerns the replacement of a chord by its corresponding chord from the parallel mode. This modal mixture is most frequently called upon if the arrangement is in a major key. Chords from the parallel minor are employed in place of the given chord. The most common chords interchanged are those of the subdominant and dominant functions. Chords of the tonic function are occasionally, but less often interchanged.

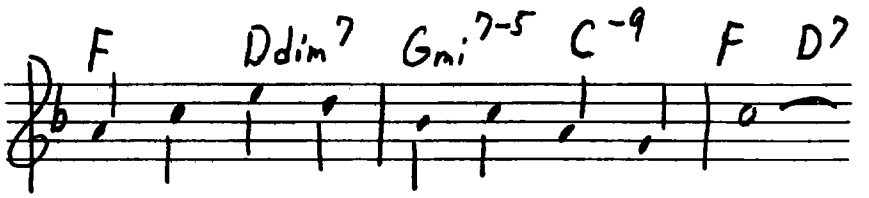
A chord may be replaced by its corresponding chord from the parallel mode. The mode parallel to F major is F minor. The G minor^{7} chord in bar six of "Georgia" may be altered to conform to the F minor scale. The chord would then become G-half-diminished (G$^{7-5}$), as in example 3a. To further emphasize this temporary change in modality,

a minor ninth (D-flat) may be added to the following C^7 chord, as in example 3b, also conforming to the F minor scale.

example 3a. "Georgia," measures 5-7.



example 3b. "Georgia," measures 5-7.



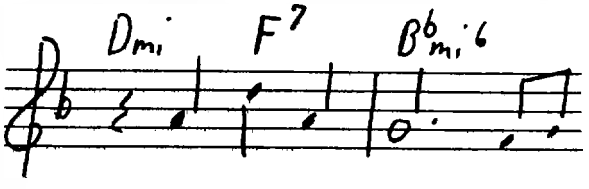
The fourth technique concerns the concept of secondary dominants. Briefly, the concept states that any chord based on a major or minor triad may be preceded by its dominant. (This concept excludes the subtonic, and in a minor key the supertonic, because these chords are diminished and therefore cannot serve a tonic function). The most common secondary dominants are the dominant and the subtonic chords. The mediant chord, although rare, may also be used.

Any chord based on a major or minor triad may be preceded by its dominant. The B-flat minor^6 chord in bar four of "Georgia" may be preceded by its dominant, F^7, as in example 4a.

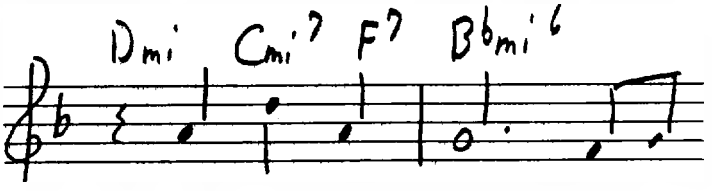
A related technique is the concept of secondary subdominants. Secondary subdominants normally appear prior to a secondary dominant. The most common form of secondary subdominant appears as a supertonic, although the subdominant chord is occasionally used. From example 4a, the F^7 chord may be preceded by its supertonic, C minor^7, as in example 4b.

The A^7 in bar two of "Georgia," serving as a secondary dominant of the following D minor chord, may also be preceded by its supertonic, E half-diminished (E$^{7-5}$), as in example 4c. The technique of modal mixture may be applied in this situation by using the supertonic chord from the key of D major, an E minor^7 chord as in example 4d.

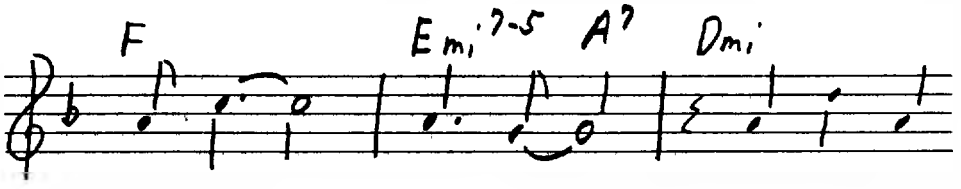
example 4a. "Georgia," measures 3-4.



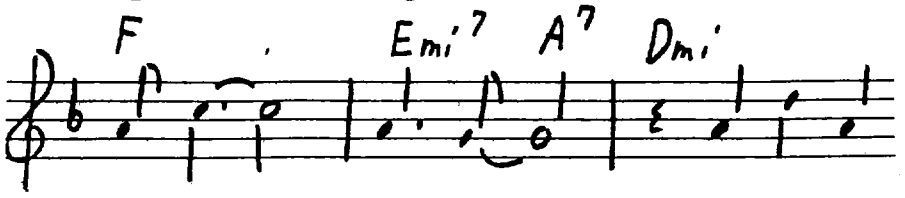
example 4b. "Georgia," measures 3-4.



example 4c. "Georgia," measures 1-3.



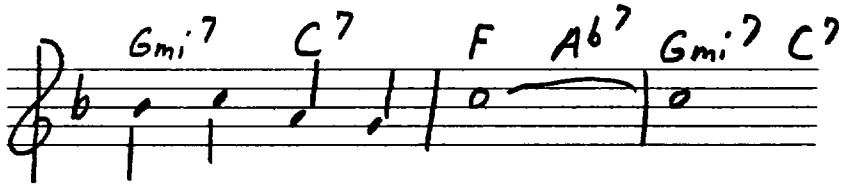
example 4d. "Georgia," measures 1-3.



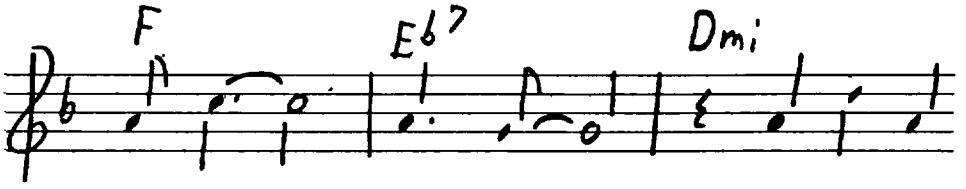
The fifth technique is that any dominant seventh chord may be replaced by another dominant seventh chord a diminished fifth above the original chord. In measure seven of "Georgia," the D^7 chord may be replaced by an A-flat^7 chord as in example 5a. Likewise, the A^7 chord in measure two may be replaced by an E-flat^7 chord, as in example 5b.

This technique may be used with great success in combination with the secondary subdominant concept. In example 4d, the secondary dominant, A^7, is preceded by its supertonic, E minor^7. In example 5b, the dominant seventh chord, A^7, is replaced by another dominant seventh chord whose root lies a diminished fifth away, E-flat^7. The two techniques combined is shown in example 5c.

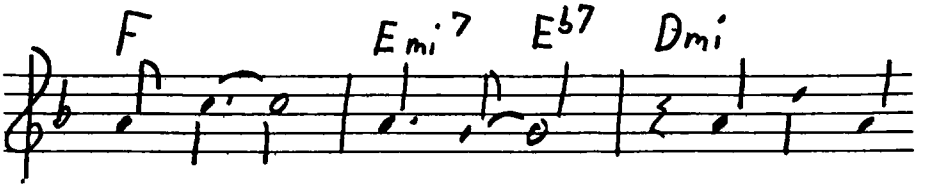
example 5a. "Georgia," measures 6-8



example 5b. "Georgia," measures 1-3.

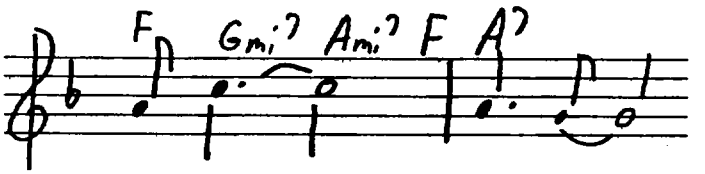


example 5c. "Georgia," measures 1-3.



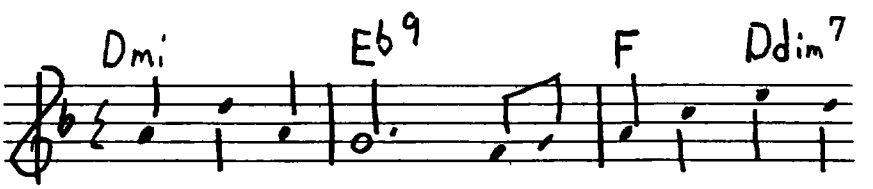
If there is a long passage on the tonic chord, the progression I_7, II_7, III_7 will give harmonic movement to the passage without disturbing the harmonic functions of the chord. Harmonic motion may be given to the first bar of "Georgia" by adding a G minor^7 (II_7) and an A minor^7 (III_7) as shown in example 6.

example 6. "Georgia," measures 1-2.



A frequent alternate chord for the minor subdominant chord is a dominant ninth chord whose root is a fifth lower. This interchangeability is satisfactory because of the common tones between the two harmonies. The B-flat minor^6 in bar four of "Georgia" may be replaced by an E-flat^9, as shown in example 7.

example 7. "Georgia," measures 3-5.



The possibilities for harmonic alterations are extensive. As mentioned earlier in this study, added notes, functional interchange, modal mixture, secondary dominants and subdominants, alternate dominants, harmonic movement on the sustained tonic, and the alternate minor subdominants are the most common. It is important that the arranger not overuse these techniques, as they are to be used only to enhance the arrangement, not for their own sake. The application of these techniques will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

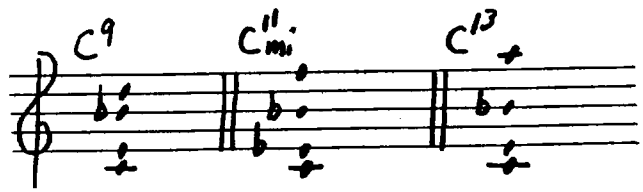
III.

Part-Writing

When employing the complex harmonies discussed in Chapter Two, the arranger encounters several problems. Distribution of chord tones among the voices, doubling of the voices, voice-leading, spacing, and texture are the major problems that will be discussed herein. For the purposes of this study, the term 'voice' will refer to a voice part not limited to the human voice, unless otherwise specified. Likewise, the initials 'SATB' (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) refer to a four part setting for those specific registers, whether for the human voice or for instruments.

The first problem the arranger encounters is that of distributing chord tones among the voices. In general, the root, third, and seventh (if any) of a chord should always be present in an SATB arrangement. In the case of ninth, eleventh, or thirteenth chords, each of these tones should certainly be included with the root, third, and seventh (see example 8). Further chord tones added are left to the discretion of the arranger. Ordinarily, the fifth of an augmented or diminished chord is not omitted because it determines the quality of the chord.

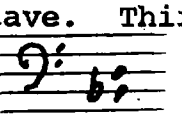
example 8.



The question of doubling arises if there are more voice parts than chord tones. If a chord is in root position, the root is normally doubled. If a chord is in first inversion, the bass is doubled if it is the first, second, fourth, or fifth degree of the scale. Otherwise a note that is one of these degrees is doubled. The bass is normally doubled in a second inversion triad. It is important to note that the rules of doubling have traditionally been the first rules to be broken for the sake of artistry. Therefore, the arranger should not feel necessarily bound by these rules.

The arranger should at all times be conscious of the voice-leading. Generally, the voices should move as smoothly as possible in order to facilitate ease of performance and musical fluency. Large skips and skips of augmented or diminished intervals should be avoided. The use of inversions will frequently help the bass voice leading. Non-harmonic tones may also help, while at the

same time adding harmonic interest.

Another consideration for the arranger is that of spacing. Generally, the interval between the bass and the next highest voice should rarely be more than a twelth. The interval between any of the adjacent upper voices should rarely be more than an octave. Thirds should seldom be written any lower than  .

Four basic textures of music will be considered in this study; unison, melody and accompaniment, chordal, and contrapuntal. The first of these, unison, consists of an unaccompanied melody performed by more than one voice and possibly doubled in octaves. This style presents no problems to the arranger and therefore will be given no further consideration here.

The second style consists of an accompanied melody. The melody may lie in any of the voice parts and be accompanied by some or all of the rest. An extension of this style is two melodies and accompaniment, with one melody being subserviant to the primary melody.

The parts progress with similar rhythm in chordal style. In this style, the melody most commonly occurs in the uppermost voice, although it may be placed in any of the voices.

The voices are rhythmically independent in

contrapuntal style. A contrapuntal texture is usually accomplished by adding non-harmonic tones (passing tones, suspensions, etc.) to a chordal harmonization of a melody so that the voice parts progress with different rhythms.

To summarize, the root, third, and seventh should rarely be omitted from the harmony, and ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths should generally lie in the upper voices. Normally in root position chords and in second inversion chords the bass is doubled. In first inversion chords, the bass is doubled if it is a tonal degree of the scale (I,II,IV,V). If the bass is not a tonal degree, a tonal degree in another voice should be doubled.

Generally the voices should move as smoothly as possible, with few large skips and skips by augmented or diminished intervals. The voices should be spaced so that there are no thirds lower than B-flat^3 to D^3, no more than an octave between each of the upper parts, and no more than a twelfth between the bass and tenor. The various textures normally employed are melody and accompaniment, chordal and contrapuntal.

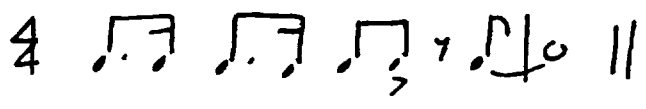
IV.

Rhythmic Variants

The next major problem the arranger encounters is that of rhythmic notation. Notational problems arise from the traditional performance practices of some styles of popular music, and becuase the rhythms notated on a lead sheet are frequently too 'squared off.'

The relationship between performance and notation is important in some styles of music, particularly 'swing' and related styles. A typical 'swing' melody would be notated in 4/4, as in example 9a, and performed in 12/8, as shown in example 9b. Dotted eighth and sixteenth notation of prolations is preferred over even eighth notes because it more closely approximates performance practice. Most other popular styles of music, such as Latin and rock, should be notated and performed with even eighth notes. More traditional styles of music are also performed as notated.

example 9a.

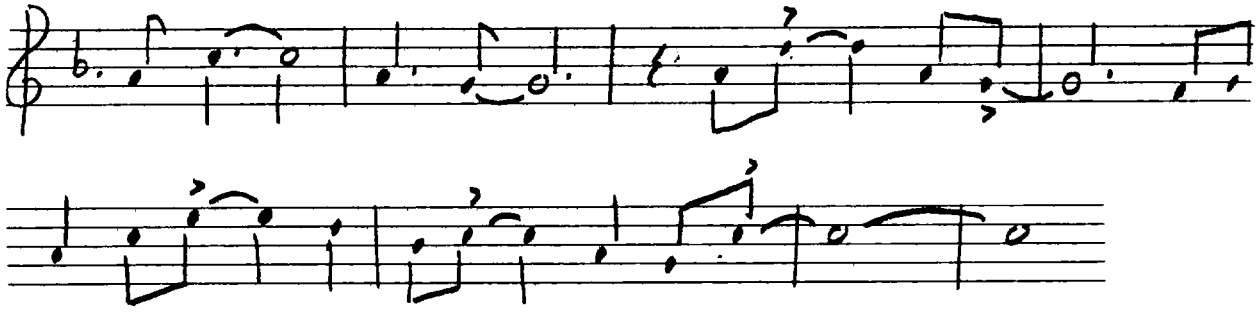


example 9b.

Frequently, the rhythms found on a lead sheet may need some editing in order to provide the arrangement with the rhythmic diversity typical of popular music. Although there are many ways of accomplishing rhythmic diversity, only the most common rhythmic variants will be discussed herein.

The first and most frequently used variant is rhythmic anticipation. This variant involves an occasional anticipation of a note or a chord by one-half beat. The anticipated notes are usually accented. In example 10, anticipations have been added to the first eight measures of "Georgia" as they might appear in an arrangement.

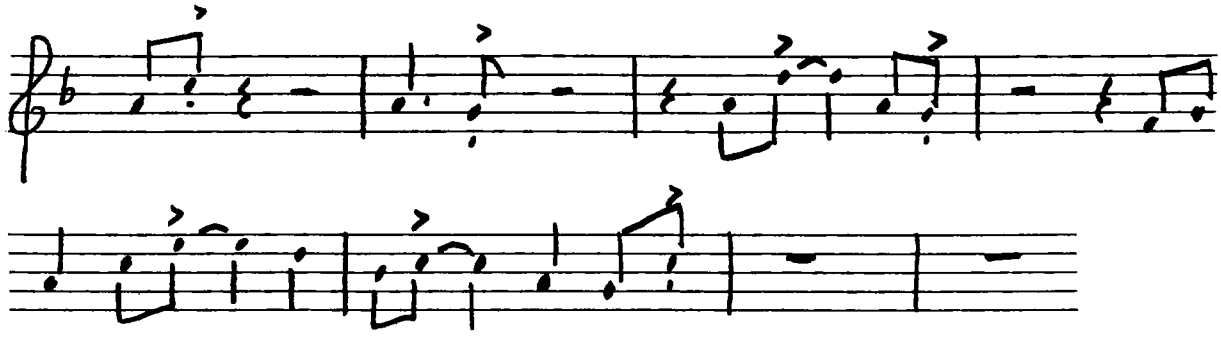
example 10.



The staccato motive ending is another common rhythmic variant. This is accomplished by shortening

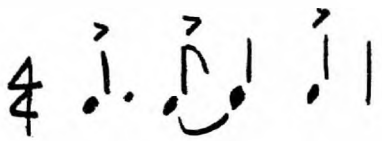
anticipating, and accenting the last note of a motive, thus giving the motive an abrupt ending. This technique is most often used in jazz style, especially in conjunction with fast tempos. The staccato motive ending applied to "Georgia" might appear as in example 11.

example 11.

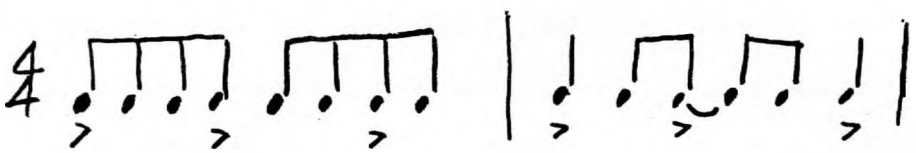


In all styles of popular music there is one particular rhythm pattern (example 12) that deserves special mention because of its extensive use. Although this rhythm is found in 4/4 time, it really divides a 4/4 measure into one 6/8 measure and one 2/8 measure by grouping the eighth notes, by means of accents, into three groups; two groups of three, as in 6/8, and one group of two, as in 2/8 (see example 13). Variations of this rhythm are also frequently employed, as in example 13. It is noteworthy that the accents are the same as the basic pattern regardless of the complexity of the variation.

example 12.



example 13.



To summarize, a conflict between traditional performance practices and rhythmic notation exists in certain styles of popular music, particularly 'swing' style. Although 'swing' style is performed in $\frac{12}{8}$ time, it is notated in 4/4 time, using dotted eighth and sixteenth notes as opposed to even eighth notes.

Rhythmic diversity may be accomplished by anticipating a note or a chord by one-half beat, or, particularly in a fast jazz style, by shortening the final note of the motives to accented eighth notes.

A particularly characteristic rhythm of popular music is accomplished by grouping the eighth notes in a 4/4 measure into two groups of three eighth notes and one group of two eighth notes, thus accenting the first beat, the upbeat of the second beat, and the fourth beat of the measure.

V.

Summary

An arrangement is a very enjoyable project if it is approached systematically. The techniques discussed herein are not the only techniques, but they are the most popular techniques whose effectiveness have been proven repeatedly. The arranger should again be cautioned against the overuse of any techniques.

Harmonic alteration may be accomplished by several methods. Adding notes to chords (sixths, sevenths, ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths), functional interchange, modal mixture, secondary dominants and subdominants, alternate dominants, harmonic movement on the sustained tonic, and the alternate minor subdominants are the most common. These techniques may only be used if they are appropriate to the melody.

In part-writing, the root, third, and seventh (if any) of a chord should rarely be omitted. Ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths should lie in the upper voices. If it is necessary to double a note, the bass should be doubled in root position and second inversion chords. In first inversion chords, the bass should be doubled only if it is a tonal degree of the scale. Otherwise, another

voice that is a tonal degree should be doubled.

The voices should progress smoothly, thus avoiding large skips and skips by augmented or diminished intervals. There should be no more than an octave between each of the upper voices, and no more than a twelth between the bass and the tenor. Thirds should be no lower than B-flat^3 to D^3. Melody-and-accompaniment, chordal, and contrapuntal textures are the most commonly used.

'Swing' style music is notated in 4/4 time, although it is performed as if it were in 12/8 time. Rock, Latin styles, and traditional music is performed as written. Rhythmic diversity is accomplished by anticipating a note or chord by one-half beat, or by shortening the final note of the motives to accented eighth notes. A rhythm common to all styles of popular music is accomplished by accenting the first beat, the upbeat of the second beat, and the fourth beat of a 4/4 measure.

It has been the purpose of this study to enumerate various techniques dealing with several aspects of the arranger's tools. However, no techniques, regardless of their complexity can replace genuine creativity and imagination. It is hoped that these techniques would provide fertile soil for the arranger's aesthetic expression.

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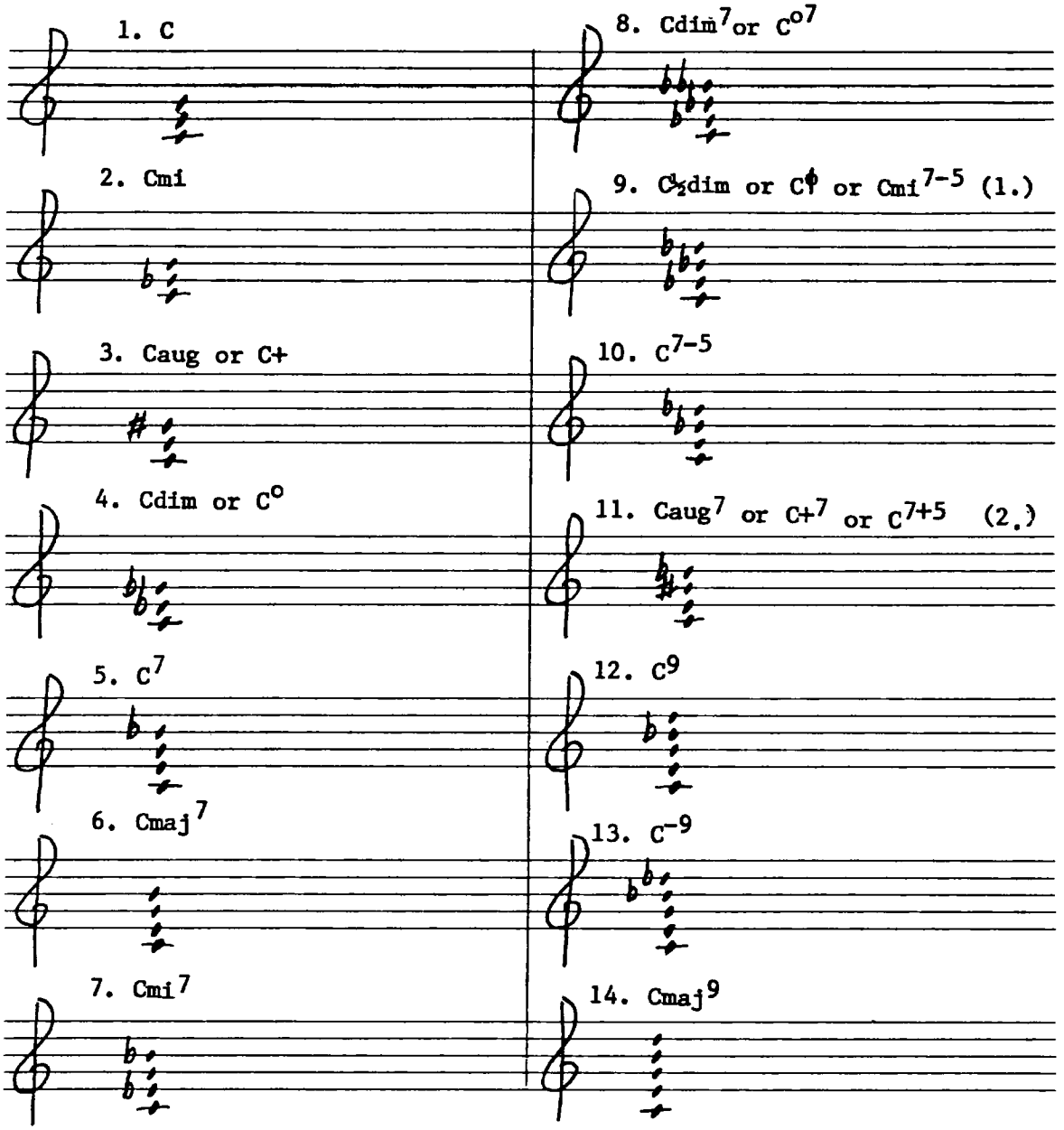
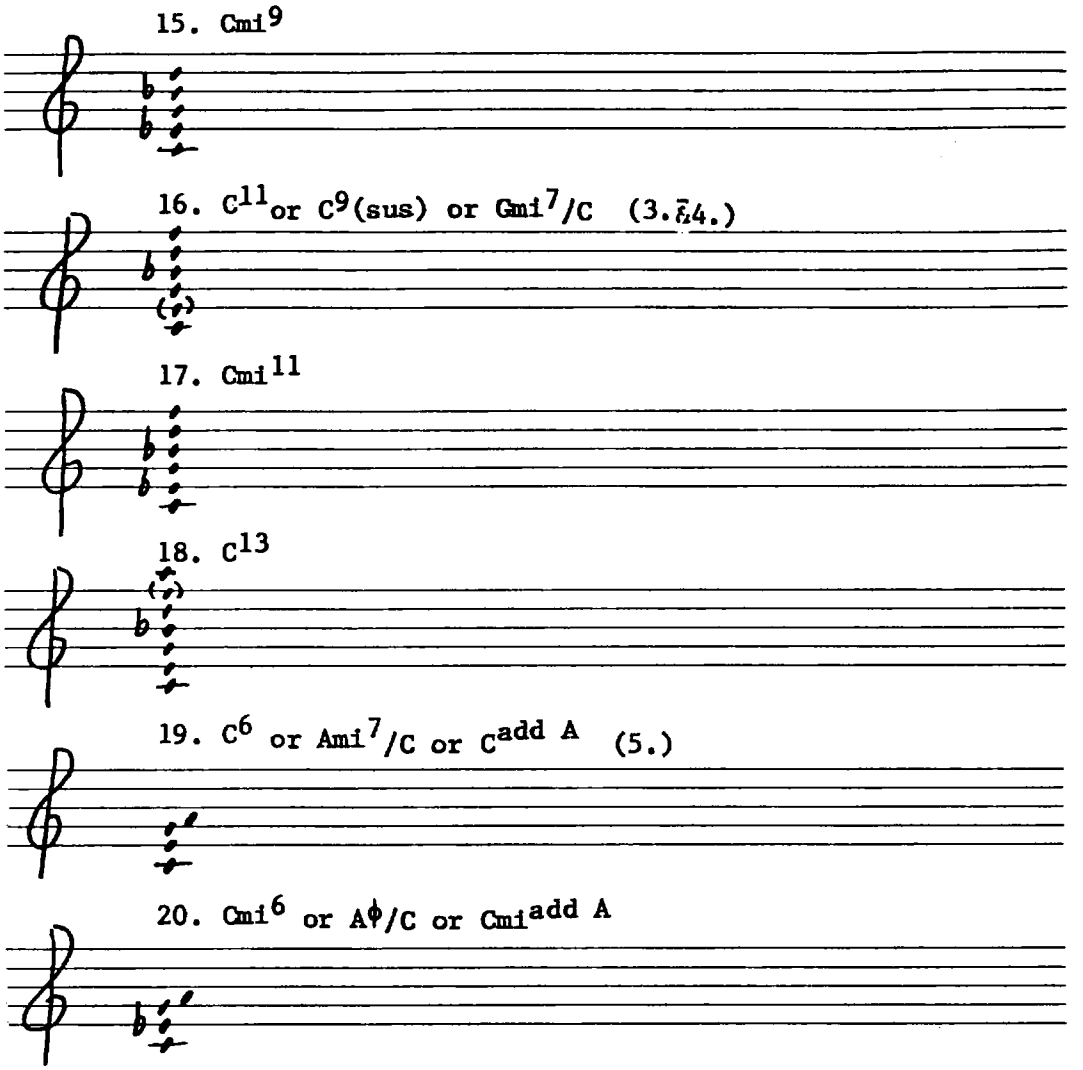
APPENDIX

TABLE OF CHORD SYMBOLS



(1.) The '-' in the superscript may be replaced by 'b', i.e. C_{mi}^{7b5}.
(2.) The '+' in the superscript may be replaced by '#', i.e. $C^{7\#5}$.



3. Unless otherwise indicated, 'sus' in the subscript refers to a suspended fourth.

4. The '/' is used to indicate that a note other than the root of the chord is in the bass. This bass note does not have to be a chord tone.

5. Any note may be added to a chord in this manner.

BIOGRAPHY

Charles Edwin Abraham was born August 21, 1950, in Leland Mississippi. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. A.C. Abraham, also of Leland. He He graduated from Leland High School in 1968 and from the University of Mississippi in June 1972, with a Bachelor of Music Degree. He was a member of the University of Mississippi Band for four years and a member of The Group for three years. He plans a career in commercial music.