8 Things Every Piano Teacher Should Know About the Blues

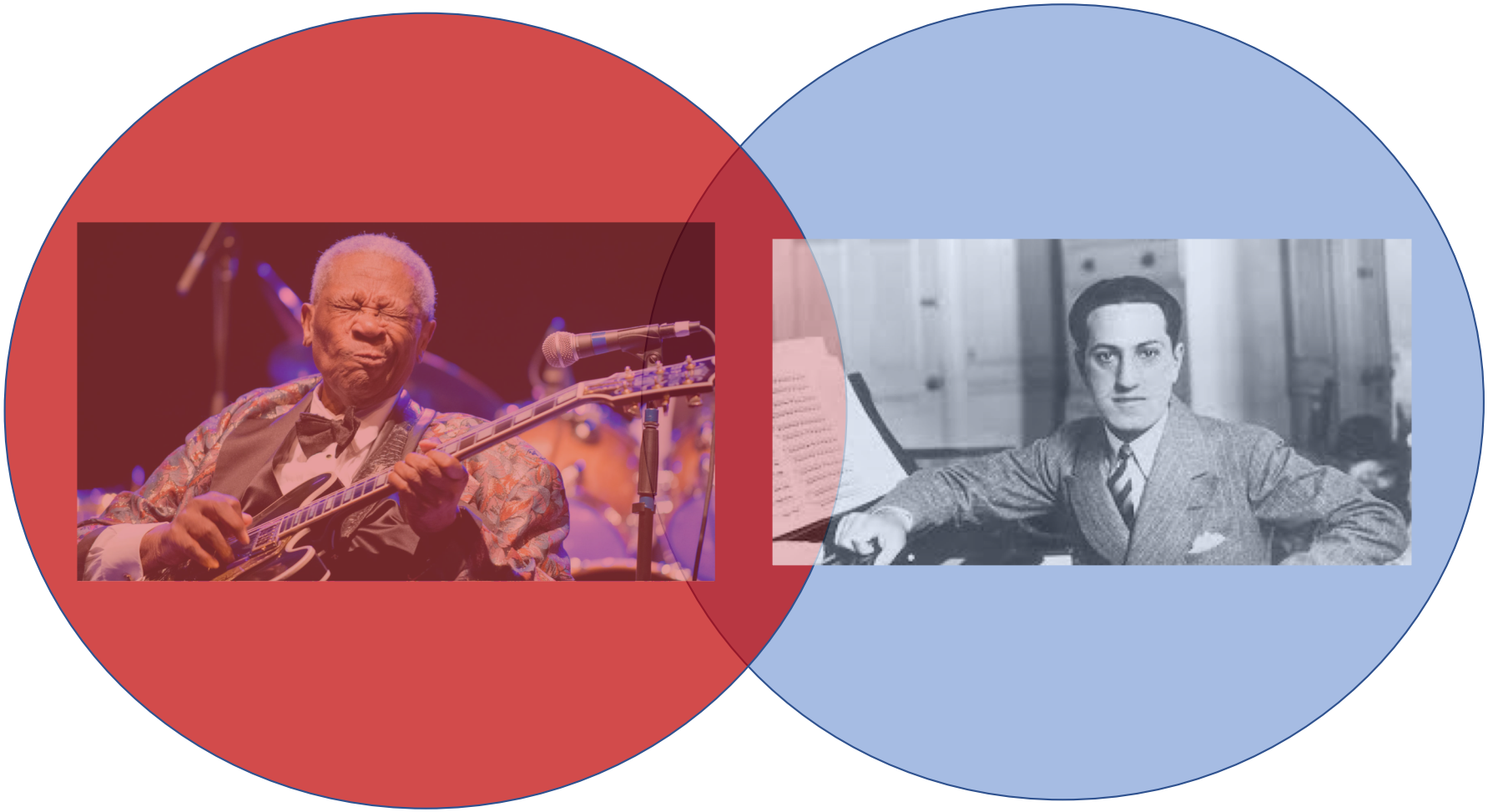
By Jeremy Siskind

(Fullerton College)

The 8 Things

1. The blues is a style and a chord progression.
2. You can add chords…and even create a “Bird Blues.”
3. It’s 12 bars…and that’s weird.
4. It focuses on dominant chords…and that’s weird.
5. It only uses one scale…and that’s weird.
6. You can “bend” and “reach” for notes on the piano.
7. You can use notes outside the blues scale.
8. The blues isn’t necessarily sad.

1) The blues is a style
and a chord progression



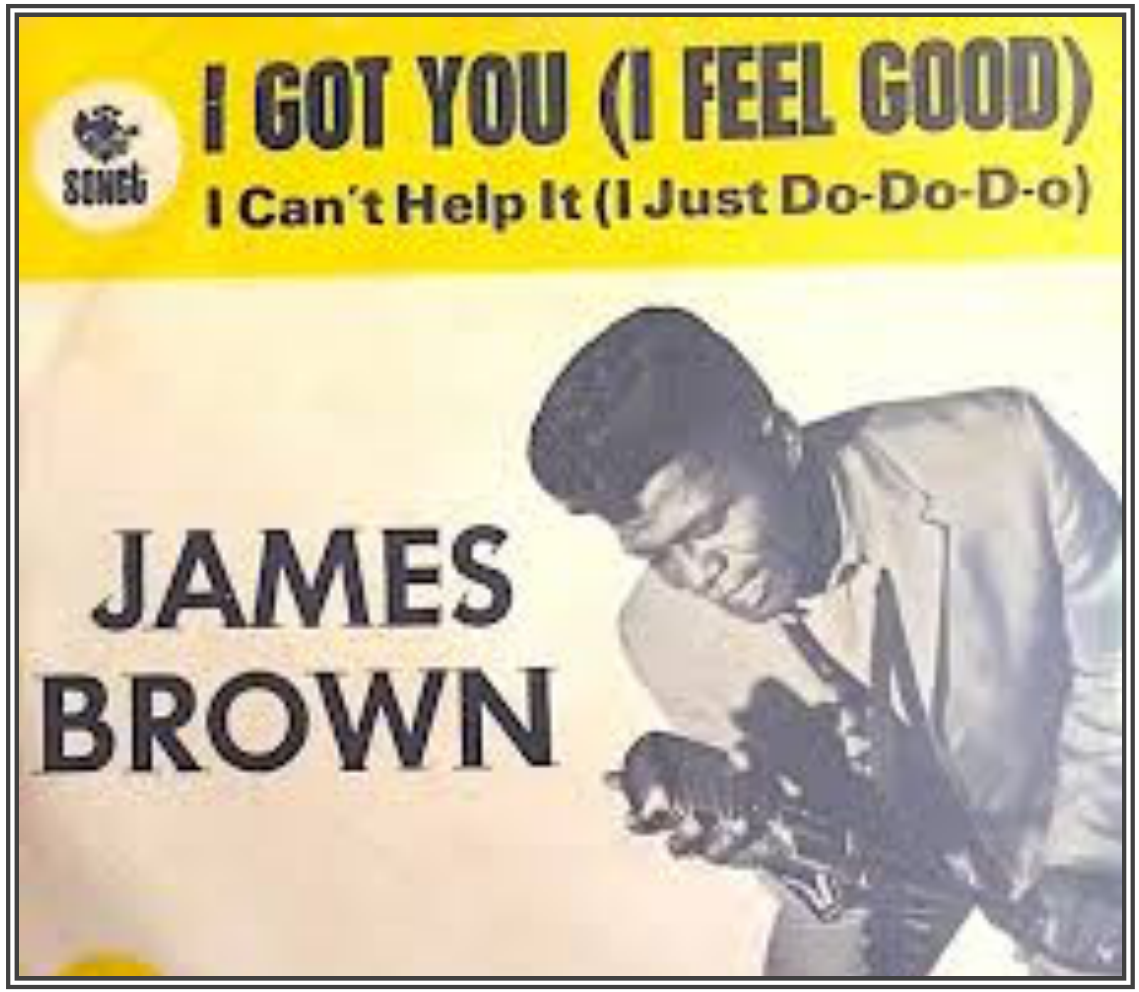
Stripped Down

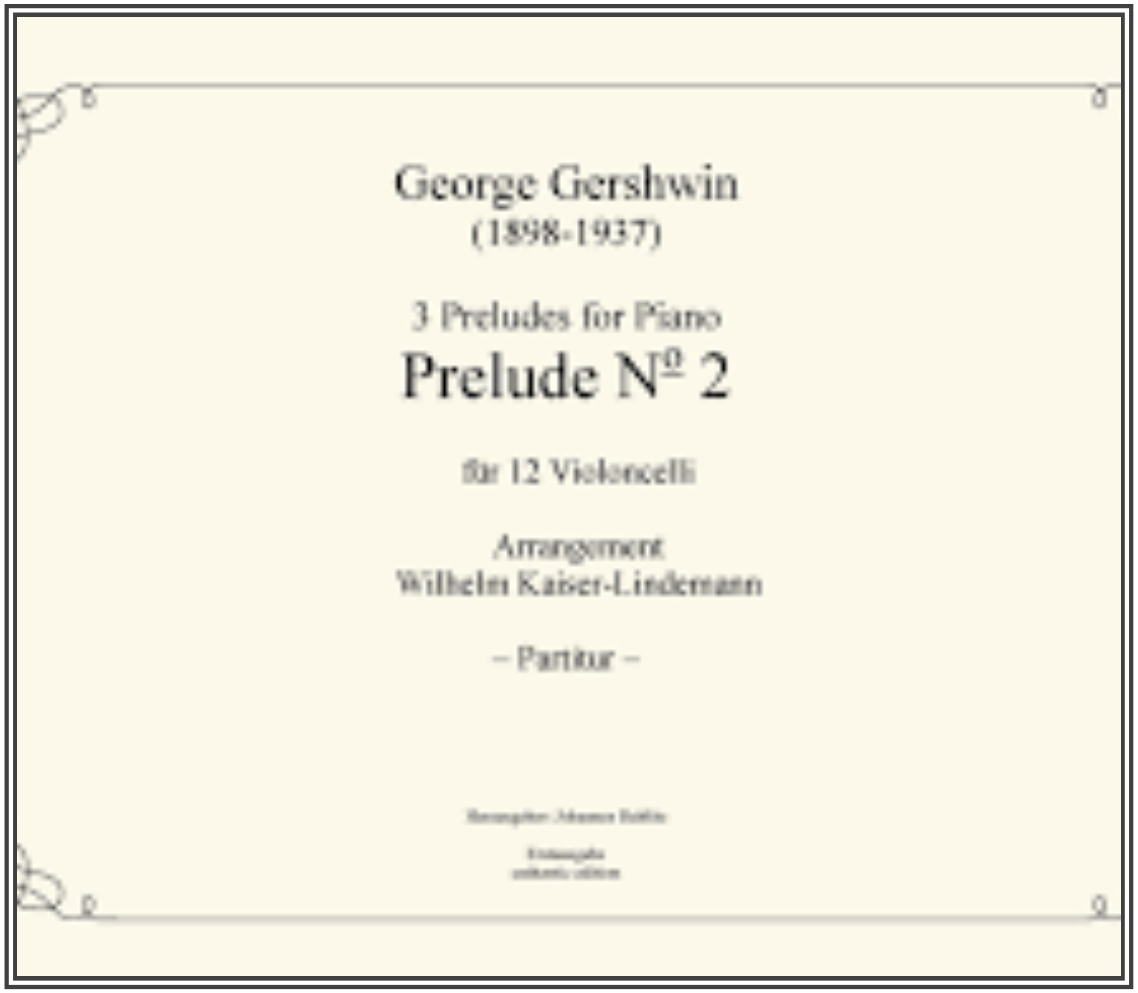
Blues Progression

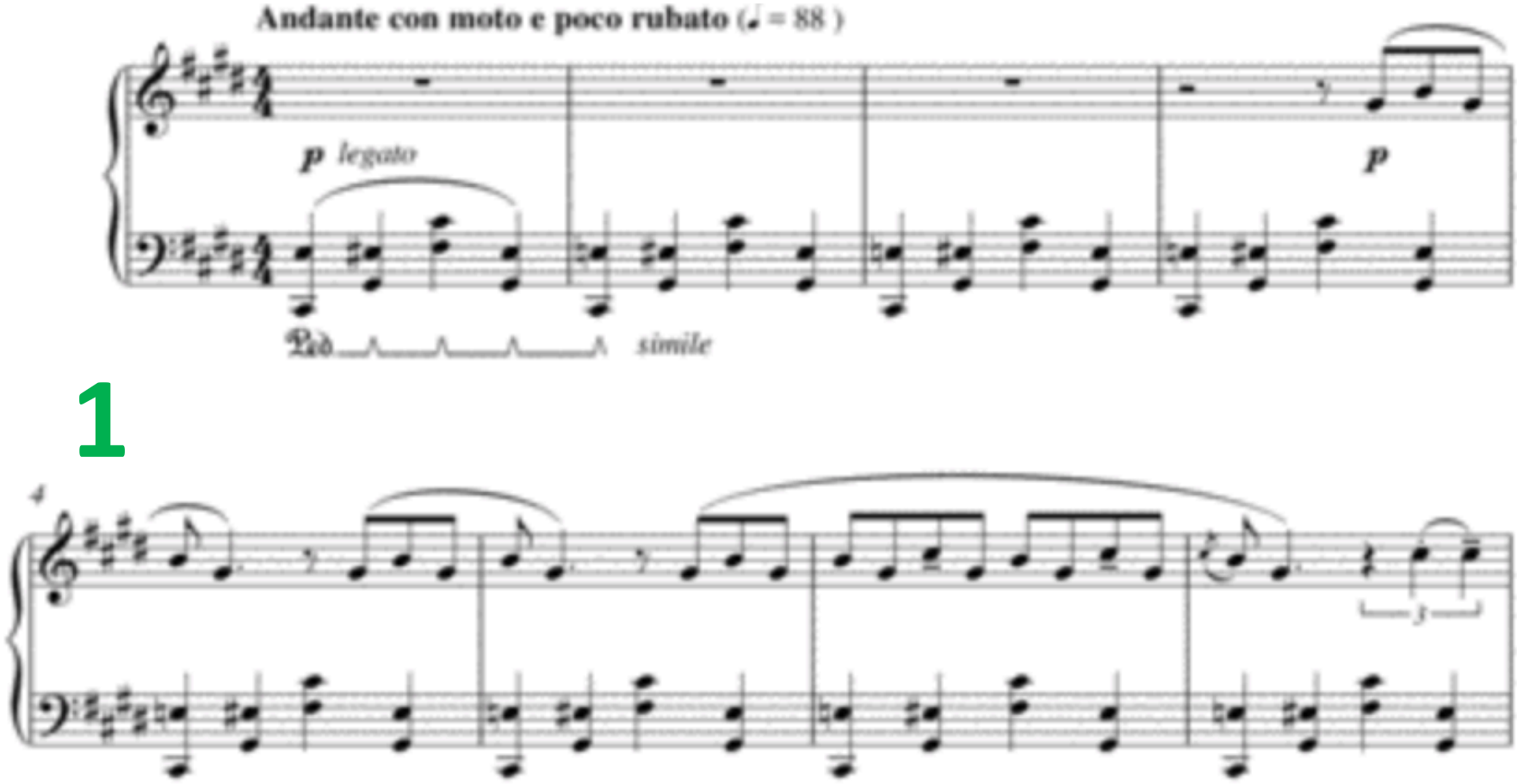
1	I						
2	IV			I			
3	V			I			

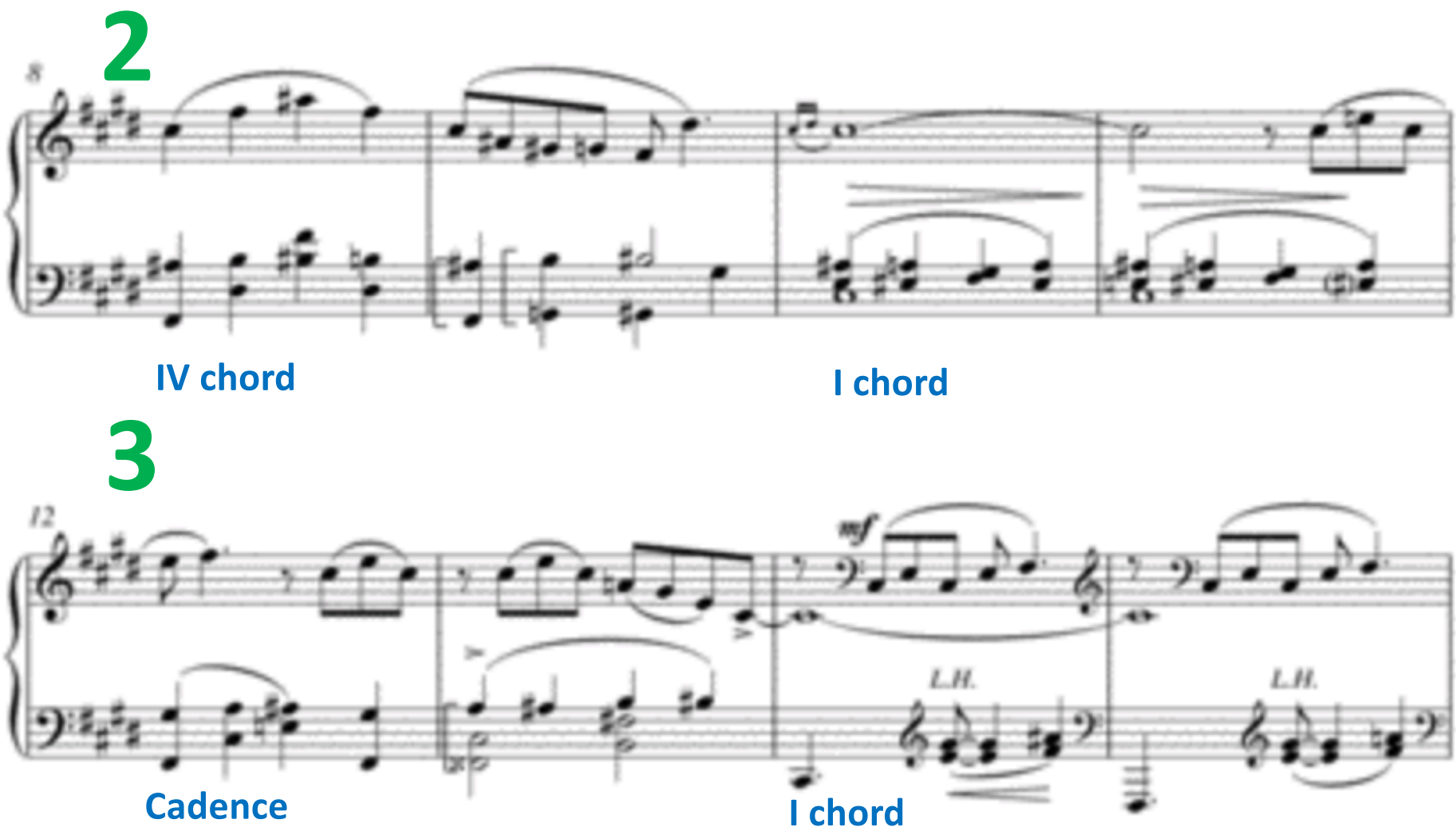
IT DON'T MATTER IF YOU'RE
BLACK OR WHITE
Taken from the album 'Dangerous' (1991)
MJWN

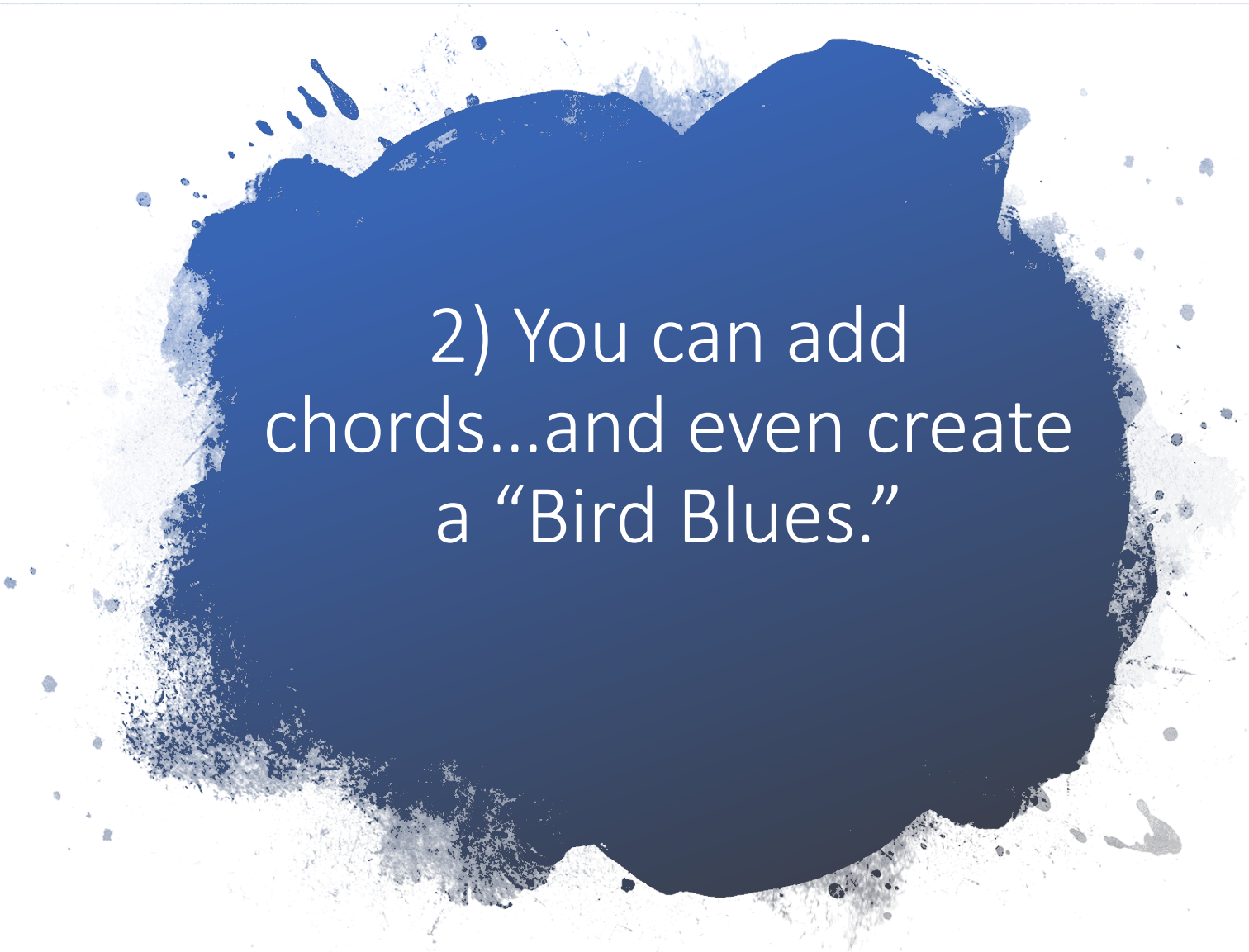
Ba ba ba ba Barbara Ann
Ba ba ba ba Barbara Ann


I GOT YOU (I FEEL GOOD)
I Can't Help It (I Just Do-Do-D-o)
JAMES
BROWN


George Gershwin
(1898-1937)
3 Preludes for Piano
Prelude Nº 2
für 12 Violoncelli
Arrangement
Wilhelm Kaiser-Lindemann
– Partitur –


Andante con moto e poco rubato (♩ = 88)
p legato
p
Ped.
simile
1
I chord


2
8
IV chord
I chord
3
12
Cadence
mf
L.H.
L.H.
I chord


2) You can add chords…and even create a “Bird Blues.”

A+

Blues Progression

ROCK

1	I	IV	I		
2	IV		I		
3	V	IV	I		

Blues Progression

JAZZ

1	I	IV	I	$\frac{\text{ii–V}^7}{\text{IV}}$
2	IV	$\frac{\text{vii}^{\text{o}7}}{\text{V}}$	I/V	$\frac{\text{ii–V}^7}{\text{ii}}$
3	ii	V^7	I	(ii–V^7)

Blues Progression

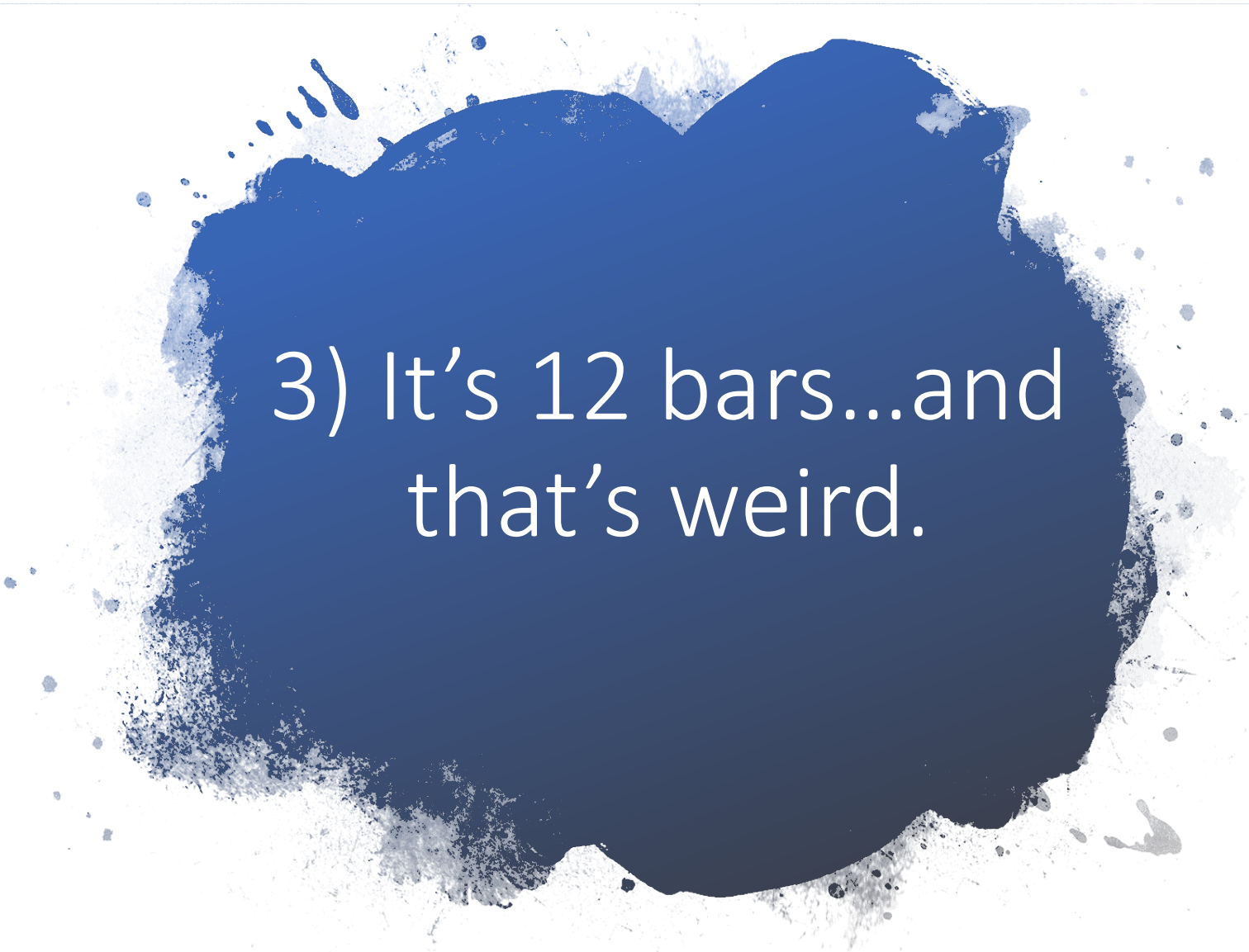
JAZZ

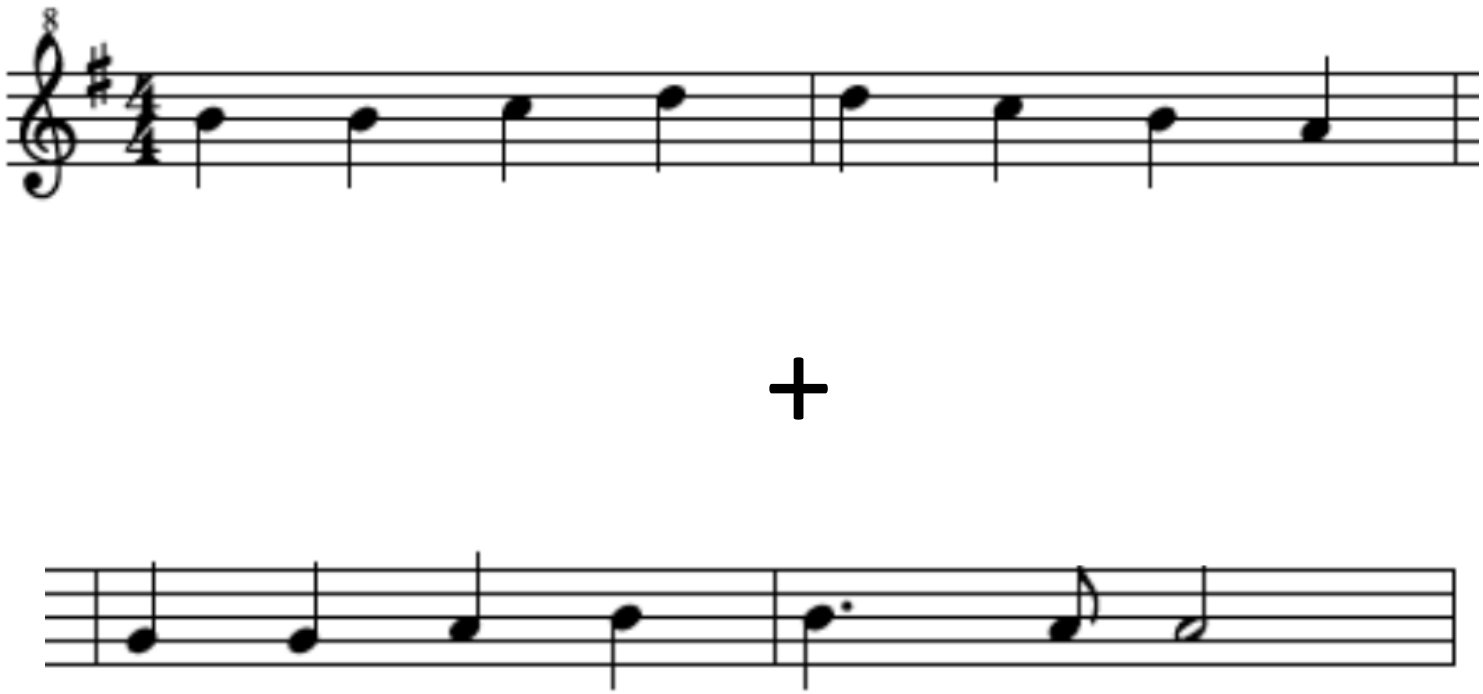
1	C^7	F^7	C^7	$Gm^7–C^7$
2	F^7	$F\#^{o7}$	$\frac{C^7}{G}$	$E^{Ø7}–A^7$
3	Dm^7	G^7	C^7	$Dm^7–G^7$

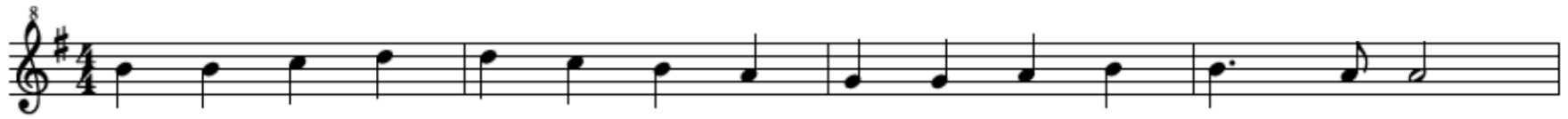
Blues Progression

"BIRD"

1	C^7	$B^{\emptyset 7}$–E^7	Am^7–D^7	Gm^7–C^7
2	F^7	Fm^7–Bb^7	Em^7–A^7	Ebm^7–Ab^7
3	Dm^7	G^7	C^7	Dm^7–G^7


3) It’s 12 bars…and
that’s weird.





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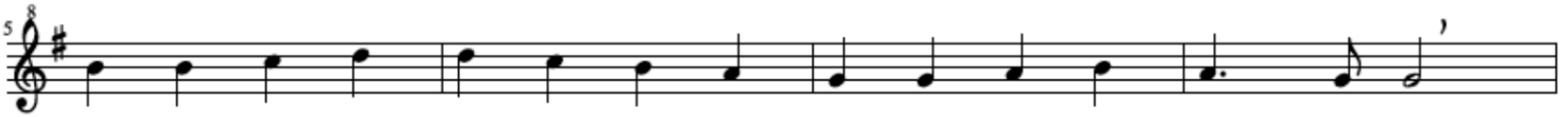
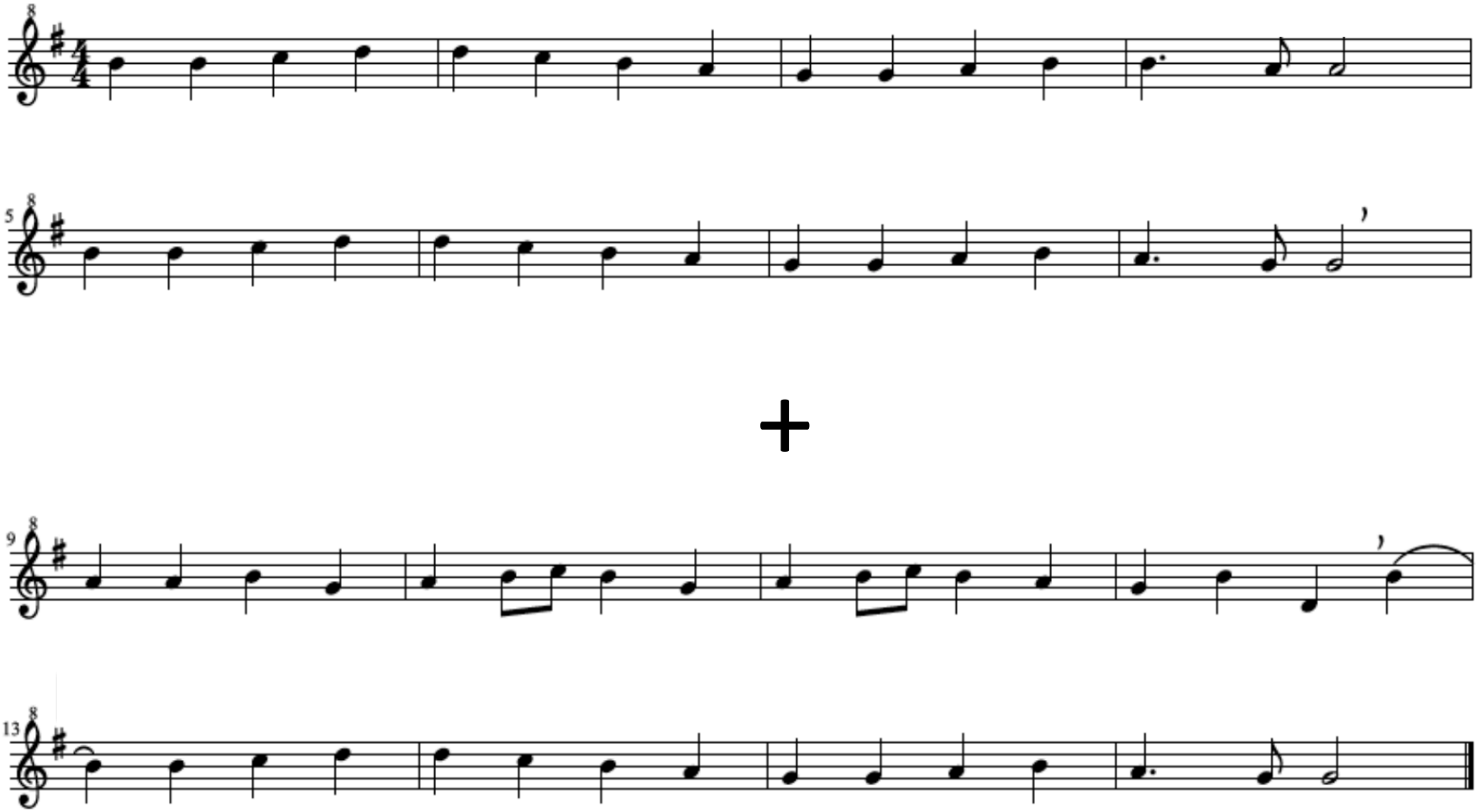
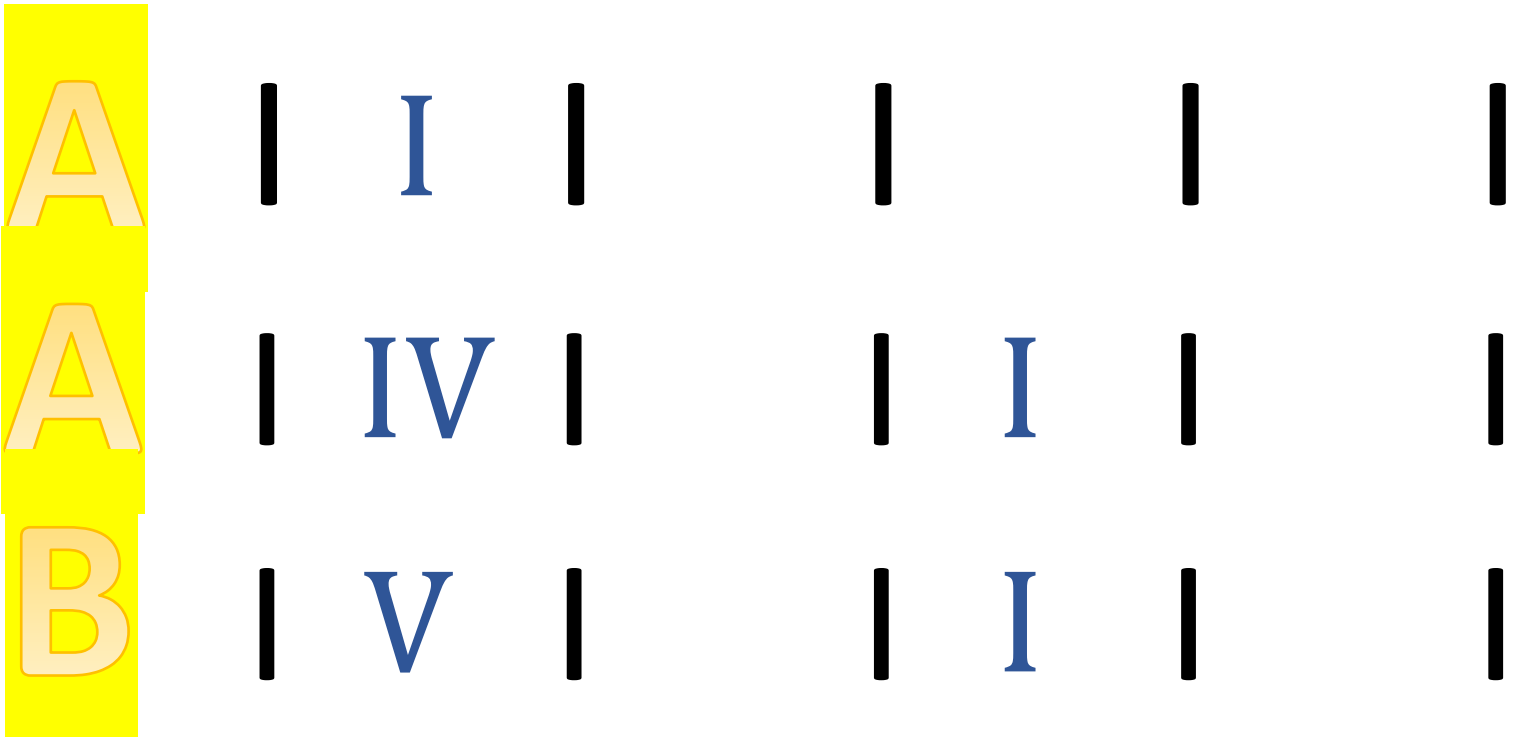




AAB Blues



AAB Blues

A

Oh, my baby left me. She left me yesterday.

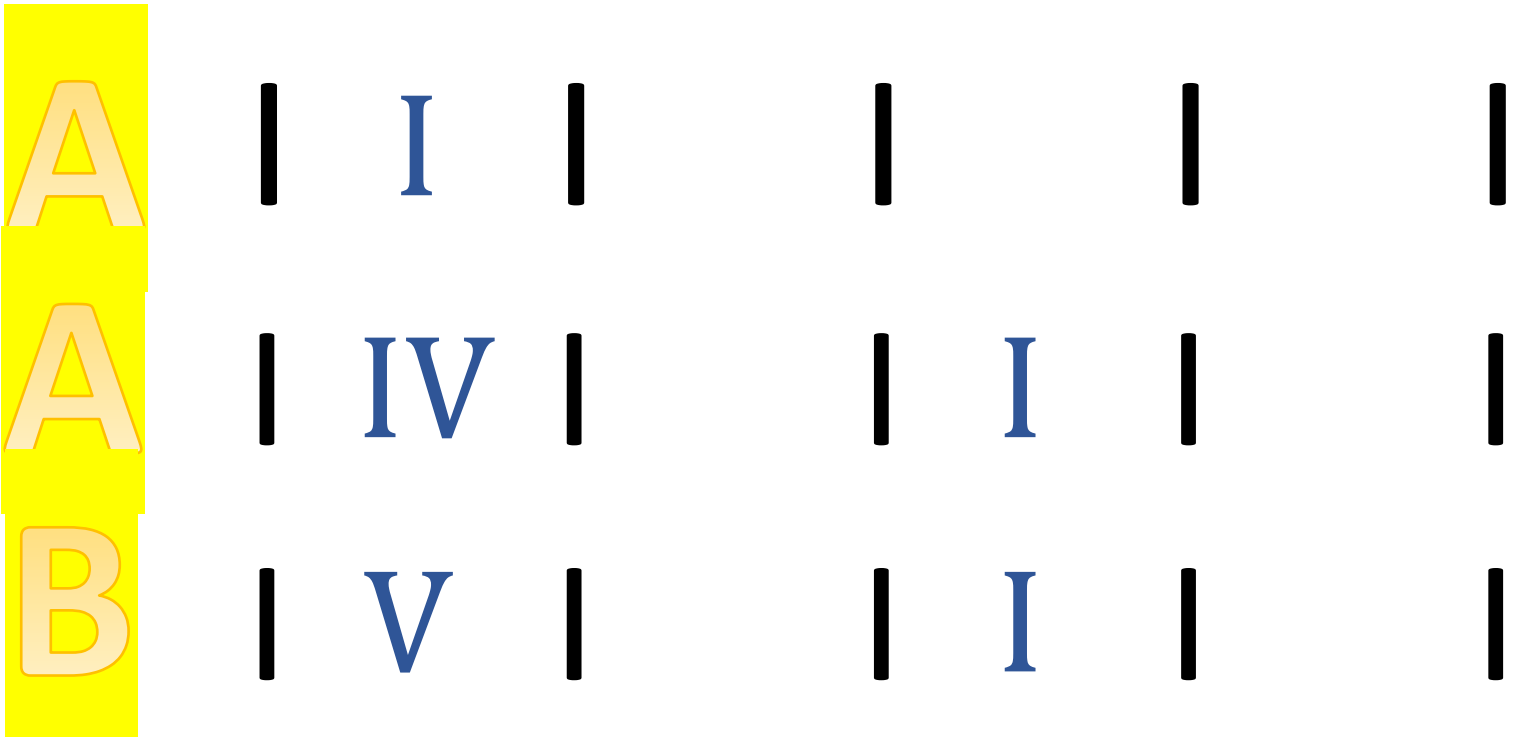
A

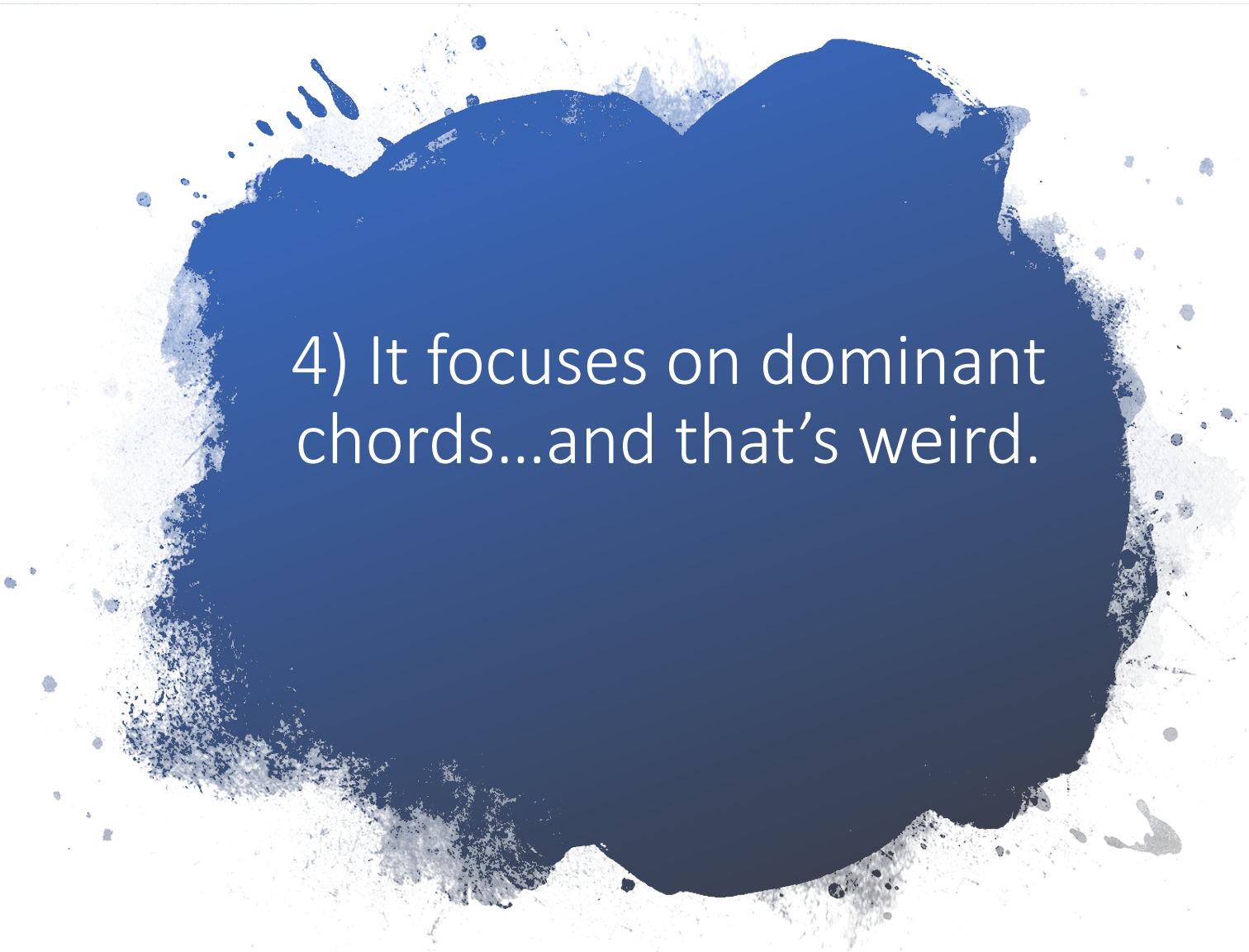
Oh, my baby left me. She left me yesterday.

B

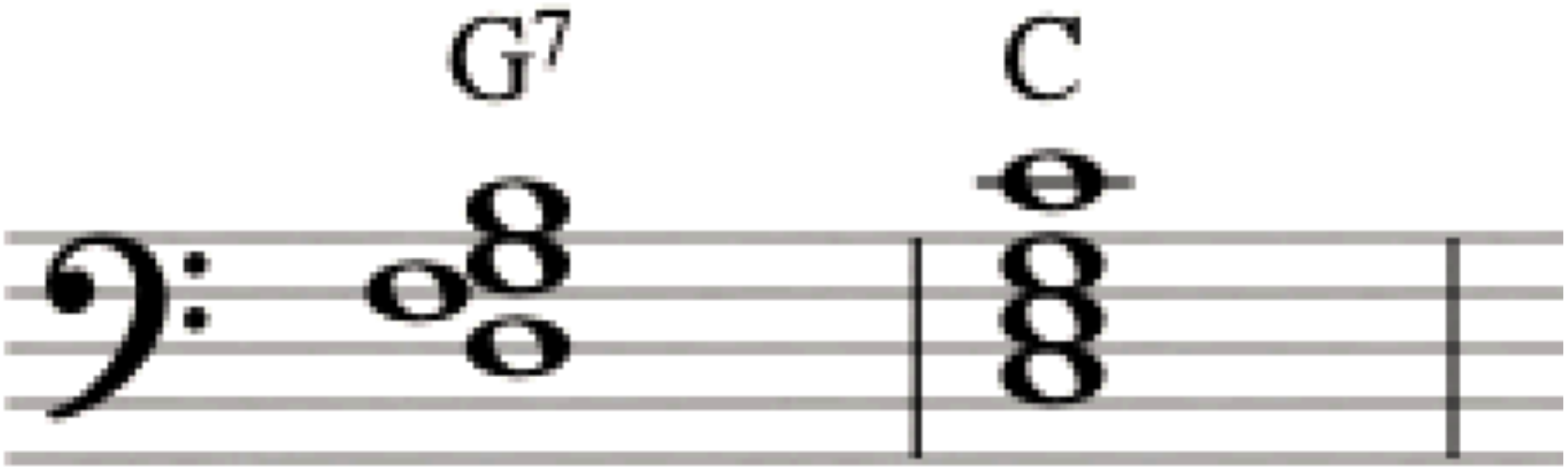
You know that my sweet baby, left me to join MTNA.

AAB Blues



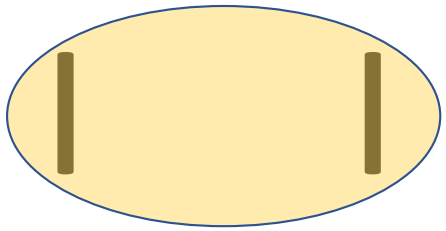

4) It focuses on dominant chords…and that’s weird.

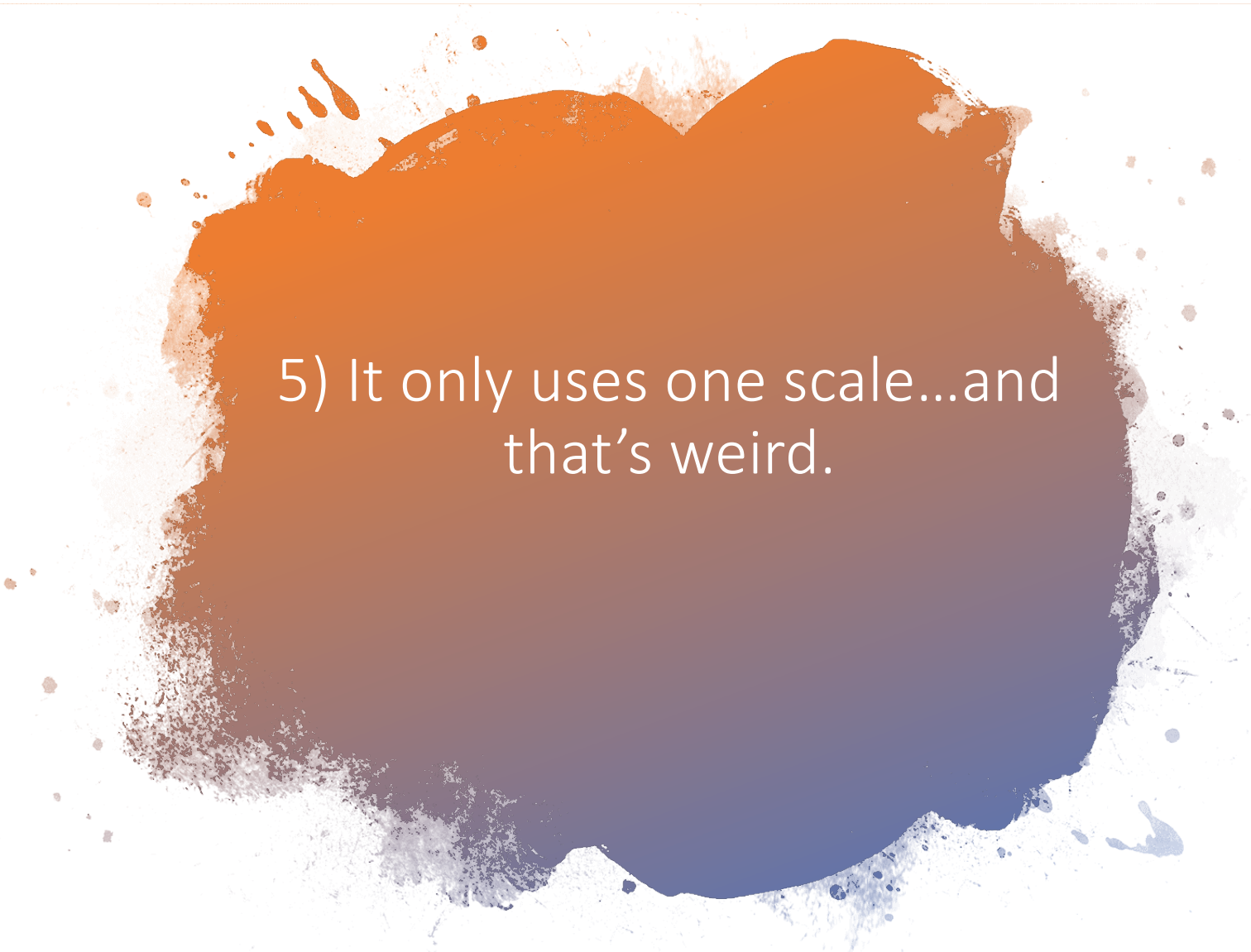
V-I



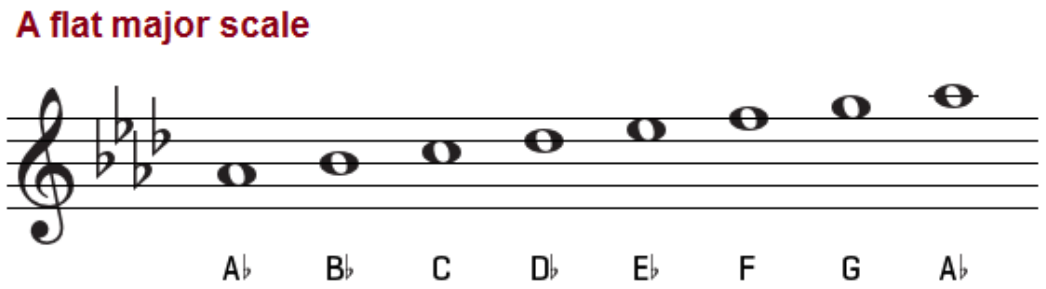
Blues Progression

C^7			
F^7		C^7	
G^7		C^7	

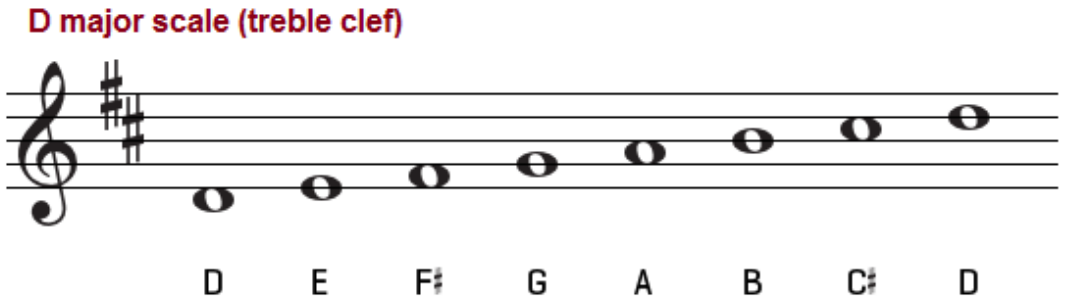


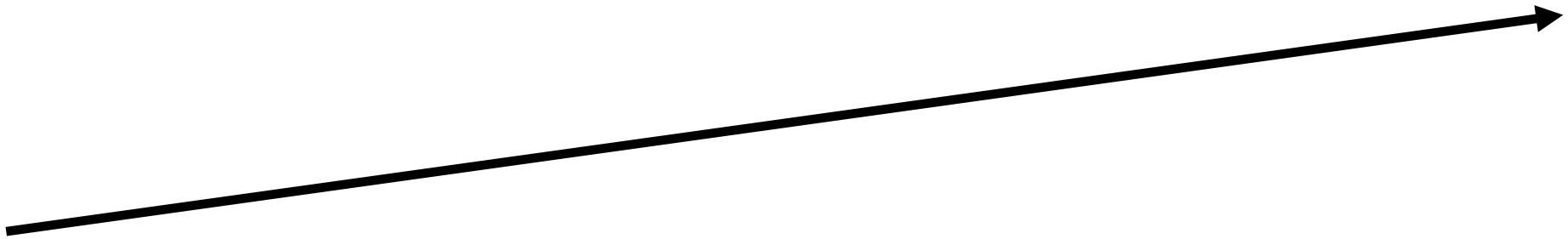

5) It only uses one scale…and
that’s weird.

Abmaj7 chord =

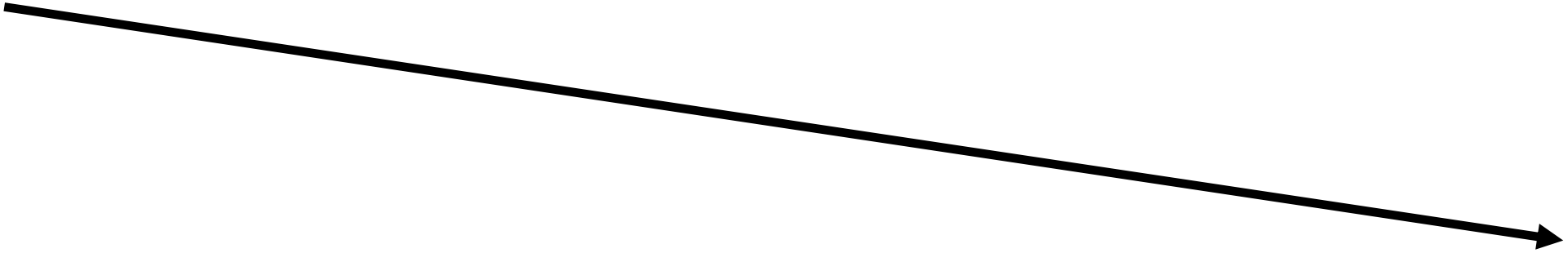


Dmaj7 chord =

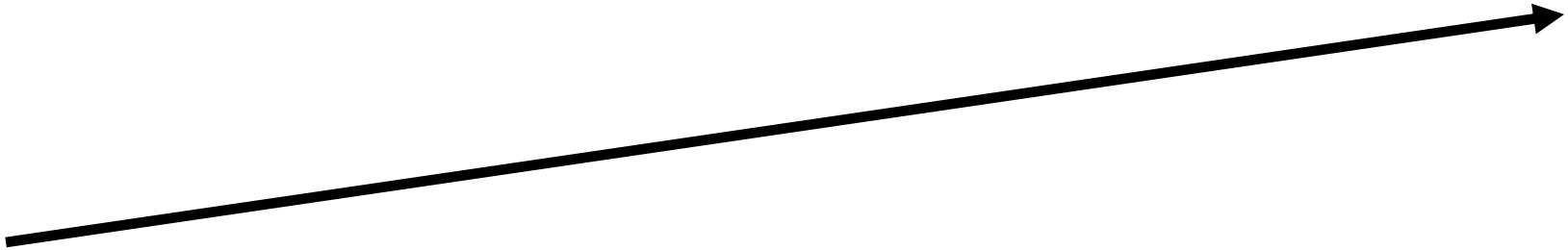




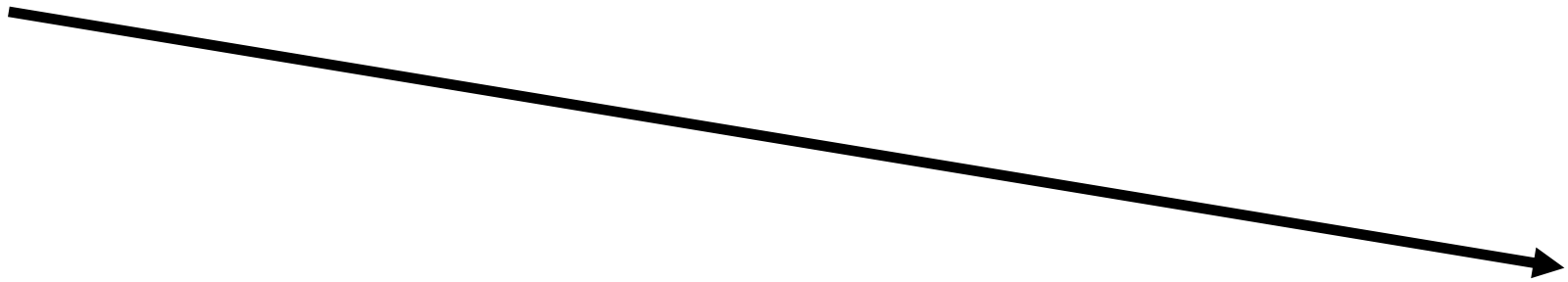
| Abmaj7 | Dmaj7 | Abmaj7 | Dmaj7 |



| Abmaj7 | Dmaj7 | Abmaj7 | Dmaj7 |

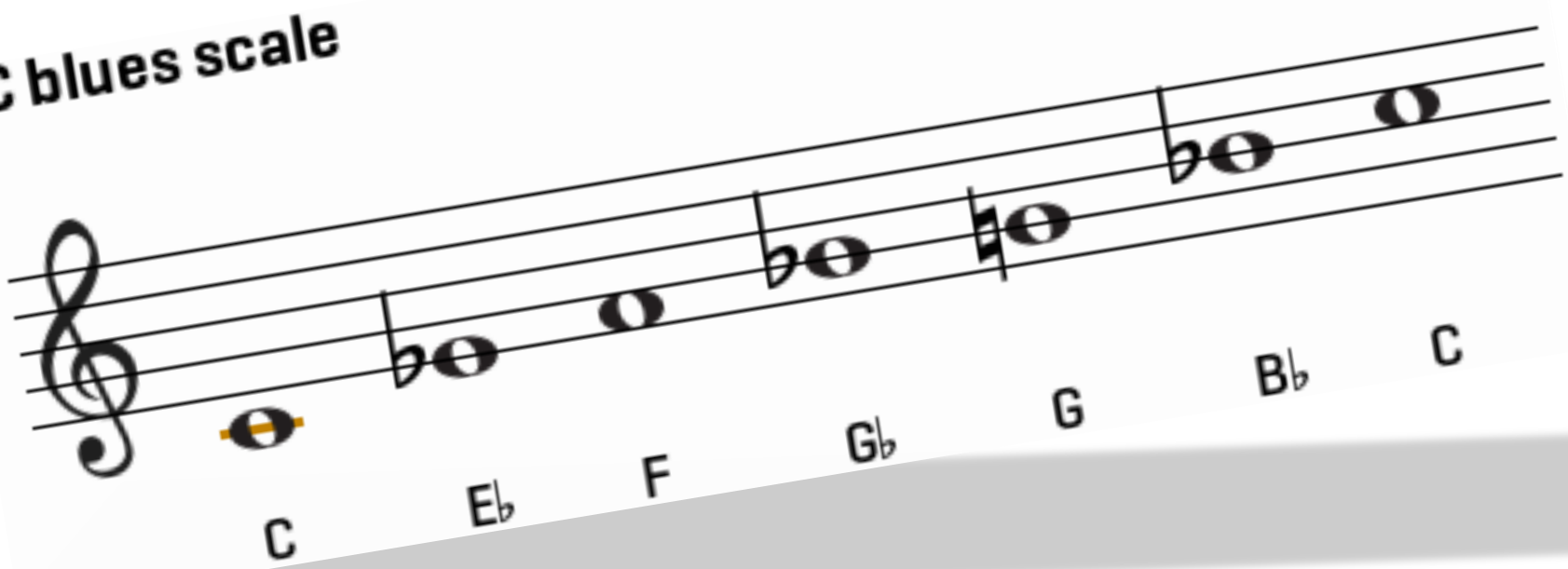


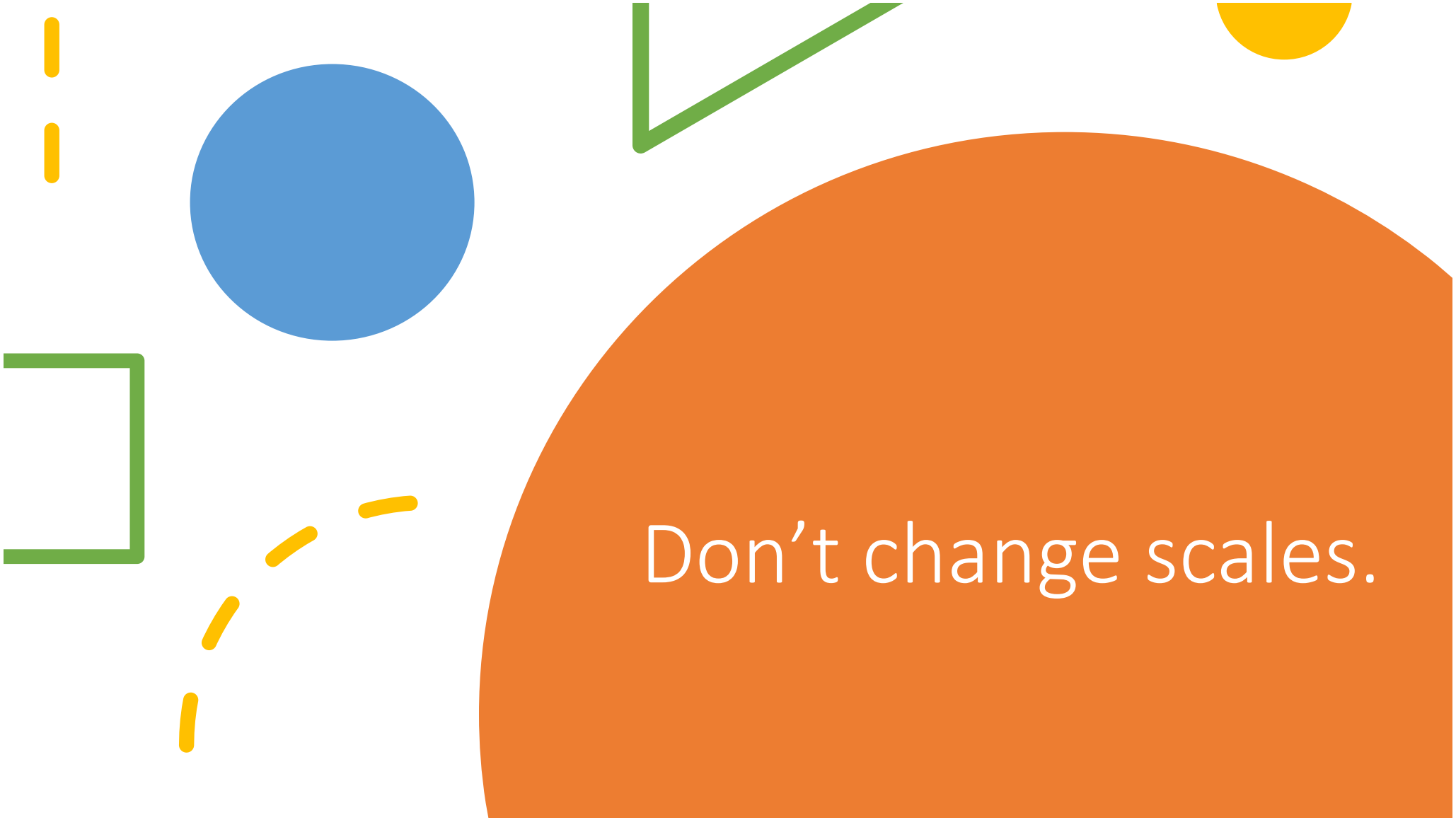
| Abmaj7 Dmaj7 | Abmaj7 Dmaj7 |



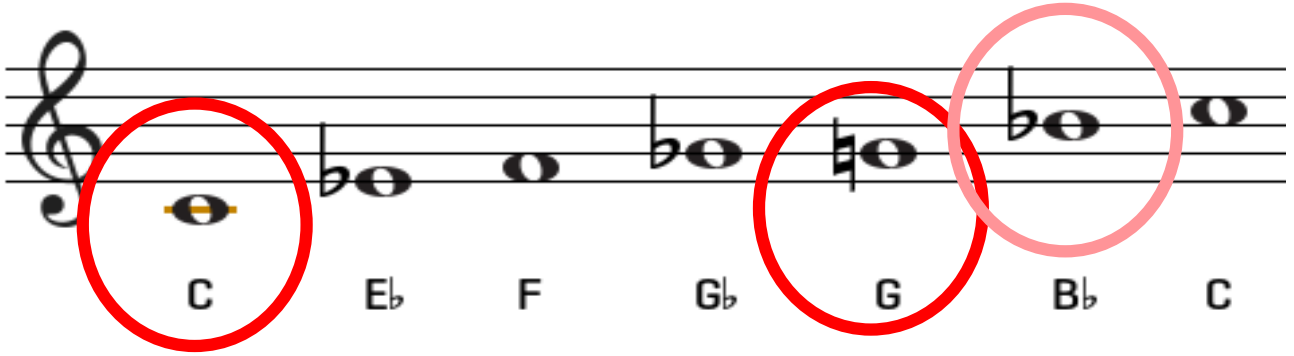
| Abmaj7 Dmaj7 | Abmaj7 Dmaj7 |

C blues scale

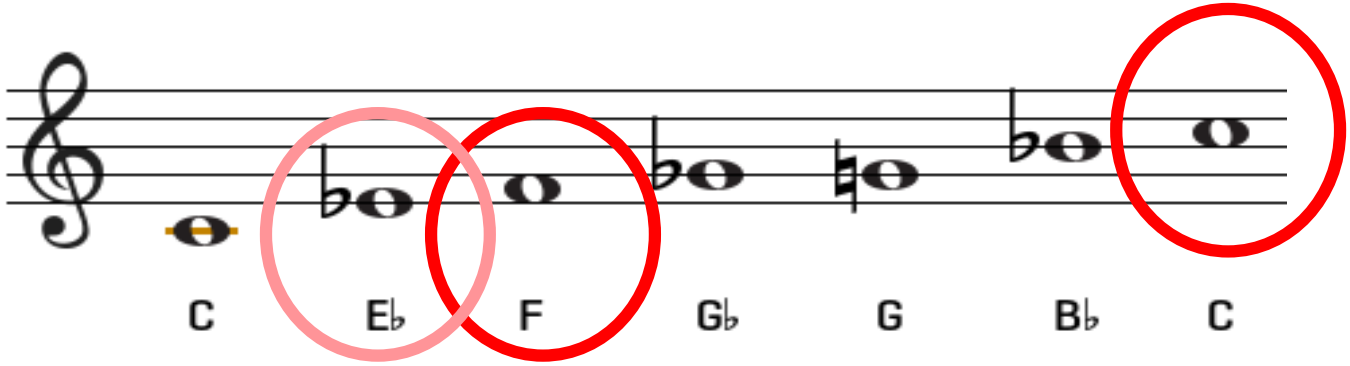



Don’t change scales.

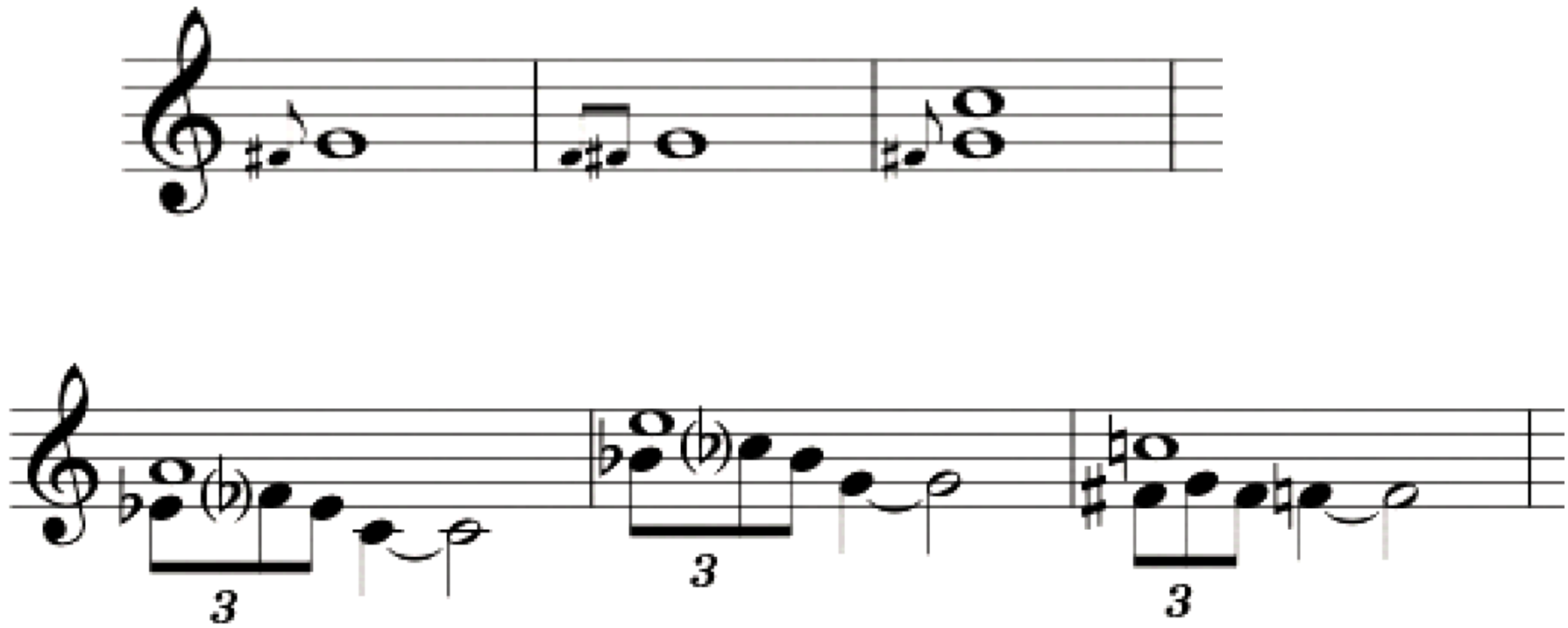
C^7

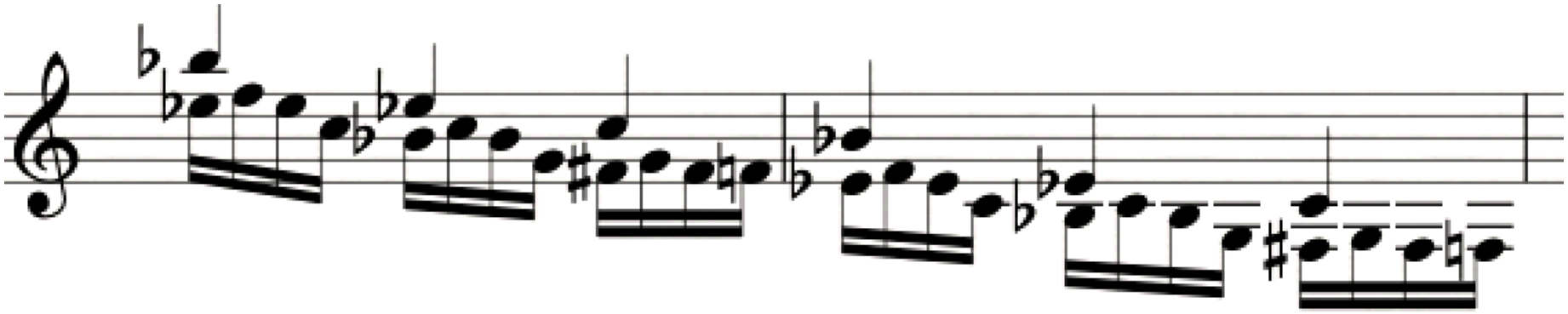


F^7



6) You can “bend” and “reach” for notes on the piano.


3
3
3



7) You can use notes outside the blues scale.

“Systems” of Improvising

Blues Scale

Arpeggio (Chord Tones)

Scale/Mode

(Plus chromatic notes)

For C^7

C Blues Scale (C, Eb, F, Gb, G, Bb)

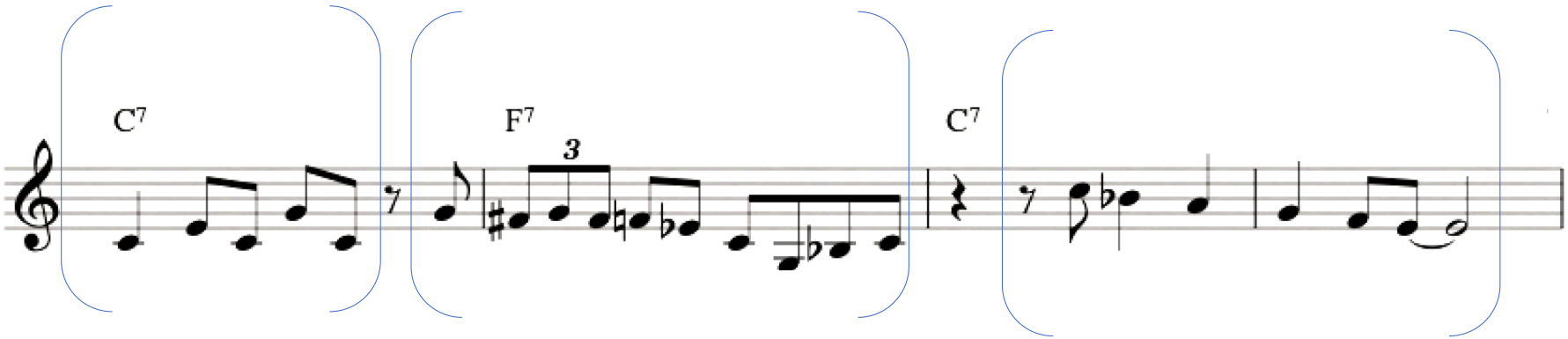
C^7 Arpeggio (C, E, G, Bb)

C Mixolydian (C, D, E, F, G, A, Bb)

C arpeggio

C blues scale

C Mixolydian Mode



Chorus 1: Blues Scale only

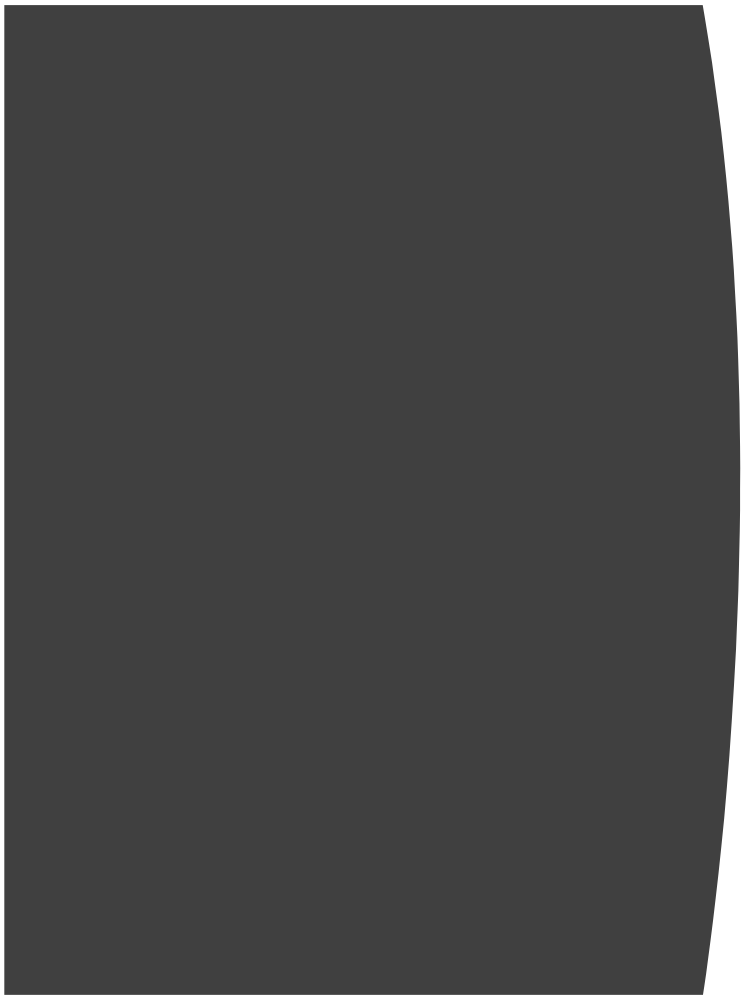
Chorus 2: Arpeggios only

Chorus 3: Mixolydian modes only

Chorus 4: Mix of all 3

8) The blues isn’t necessarily sad.

catharsis
(kuh-thahr-sis) noun.
(1) THE PURGING OR RELEASE OF EMOTIONAL
TENSIONS, ESP. THROUGH KINDS
OF ART OR MUSIC.



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The 8 Things

1. The blues is a style and a chord progression.
2. You can add chords…and even create a “Bird Blues.”
3. It’s 12 bars…and that’s weird.
4. It focuses on dominant chords…and that’s weird.
5. It only uses one scale…and that’s weird.
6. You can “bend” notes on the piano.
7. You can do more than just use the blues scale.
8. The blues isn’t necessarily sad.