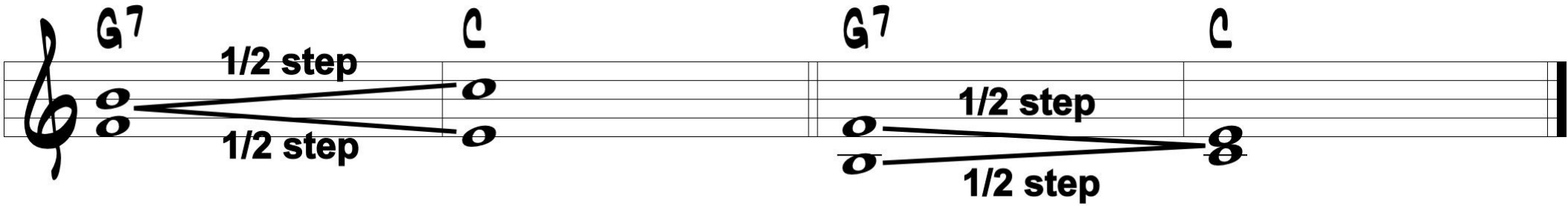
It’s All about 1/2 steps!

Dan Haerle
January 2017

1/2 Step motion in Chord Progressions

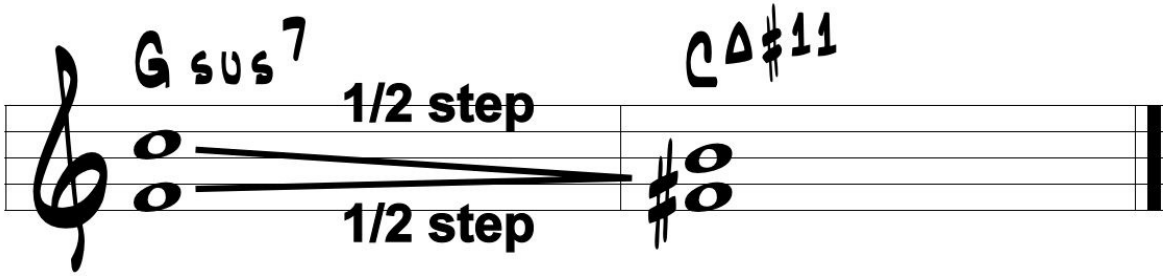
Traditional resolution of the tritone in the V7 to I



When the tritone appears as an augmented 4th, it augments (increases) in its resolution.

When the tritone appears as a diminished 5th, it diminishes (decreases) in its resolution.

Contemporary resolution of the suspended V7 to I



Here the resolution is not to the tonic note C but instead to the major 7th (B) which is an important color tone of the chord.

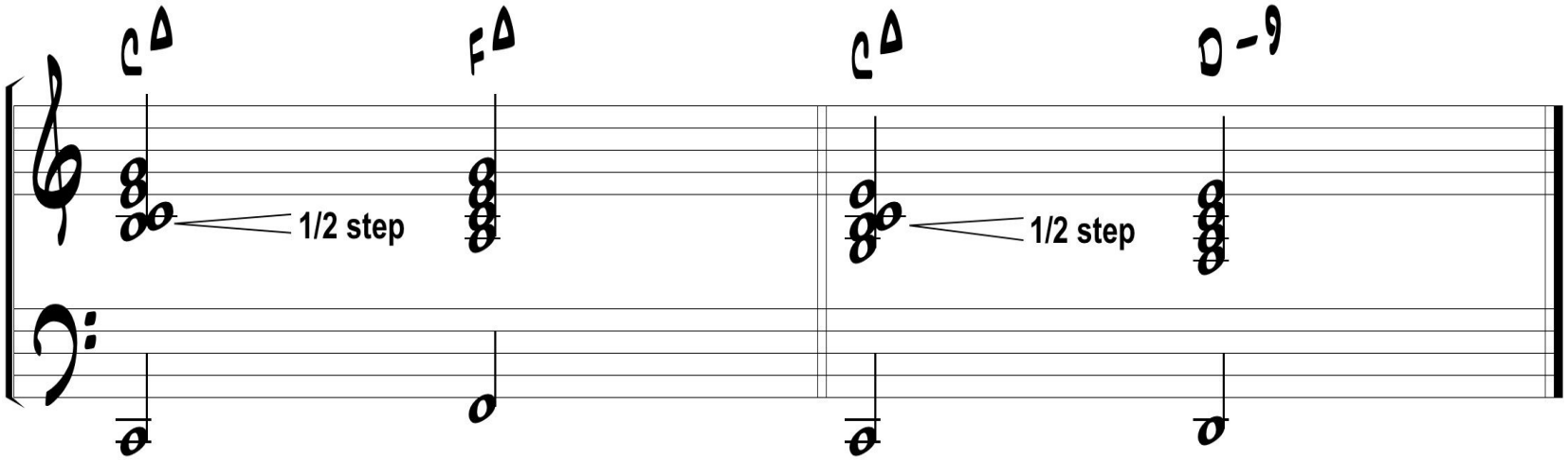
The 7th doesn't resolve to the 3rd of the C chord but instead moves upward to the #11, a colorful extension of the harmony.

1/2 Steps in Chord Voicings

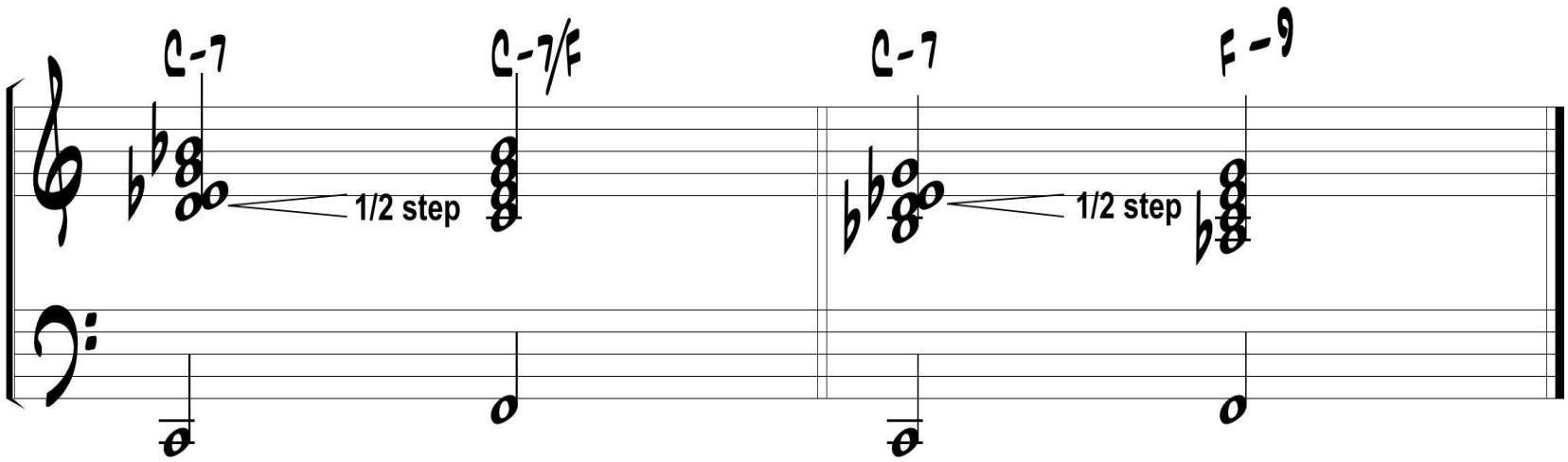
In chord voicings, 1/2 steps tend to be dissonant and create a tension that is typical and common to jazz harmony. Even two notes a whole step apart create a mild tension that sounds good to our "jazz" ears!

In these examples, the first voicings all contain a 1/2 step tension and they are followed by a resolution to a less tense voicing.

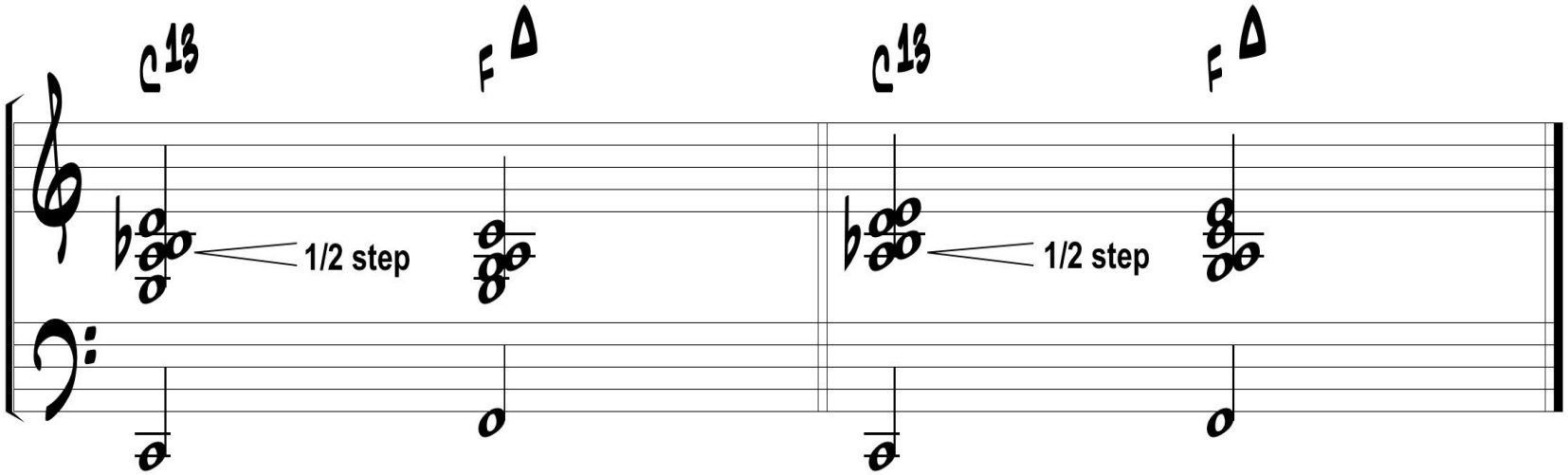
Major voicing with half step tensions



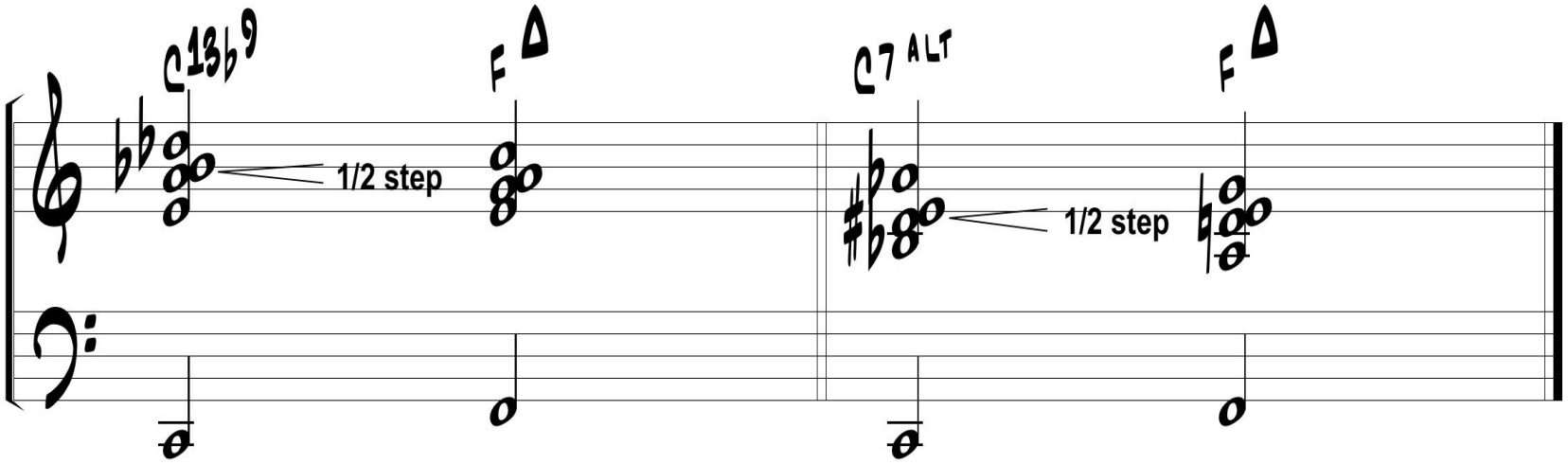
Minor voicing with half step tensions



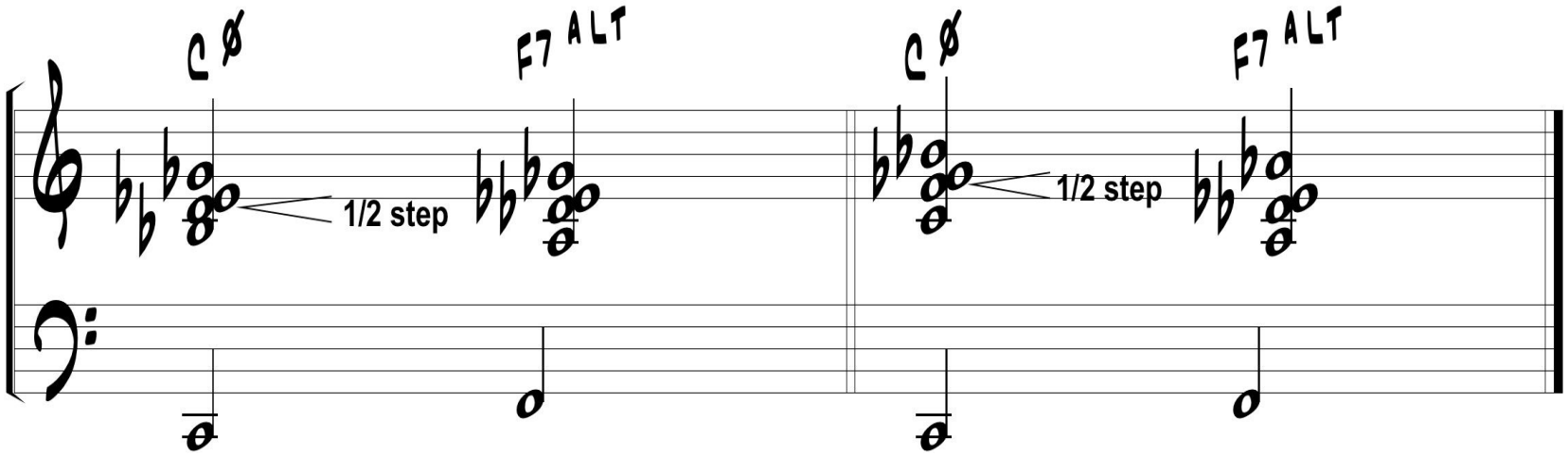
Dominant voicing with half step tensions



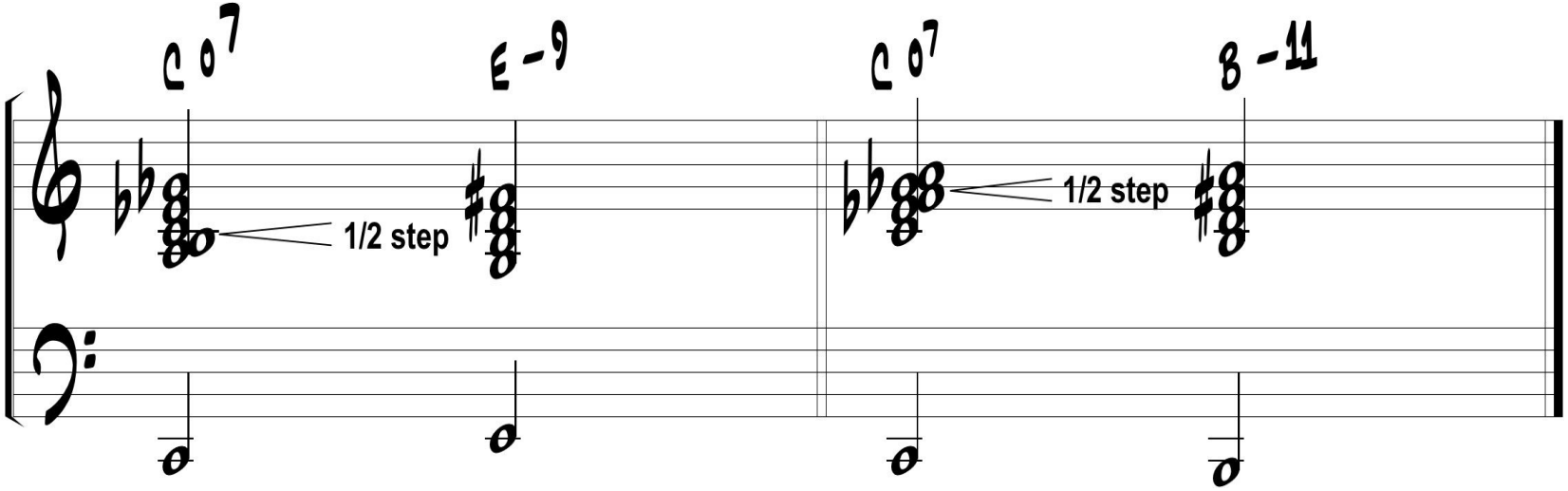
Altered dominant voicing with half step tensions



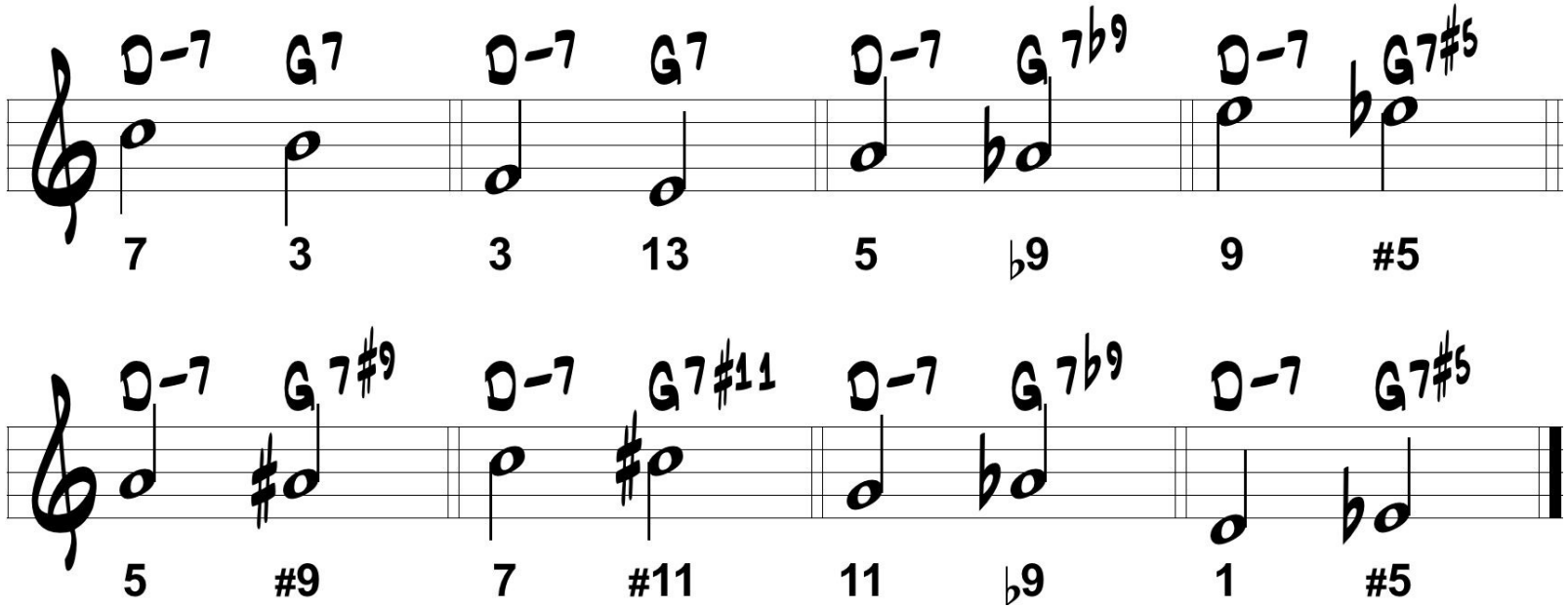
Half-diminished voicing with half step tensions



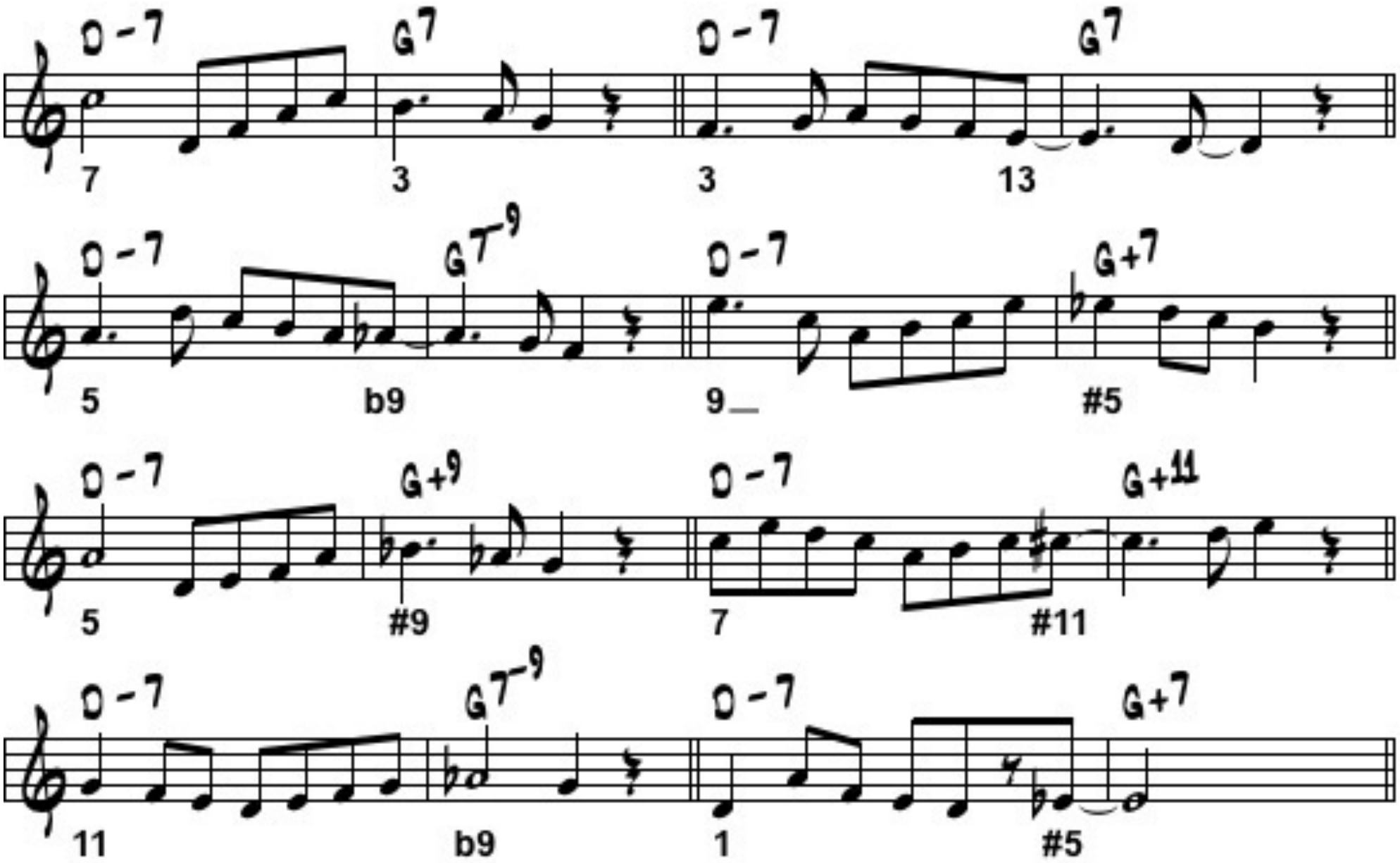
Diminished voicing with half step tensions



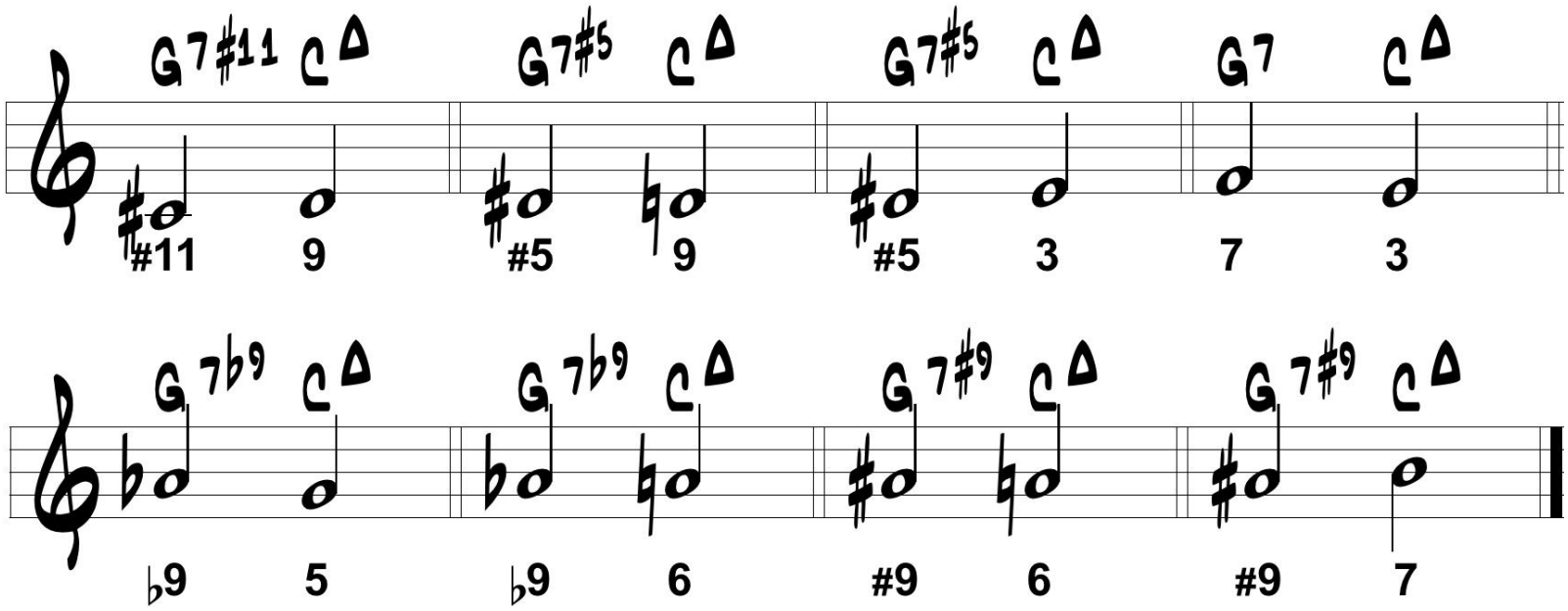
1/2 Step motion in II-7 to V7 Progressions



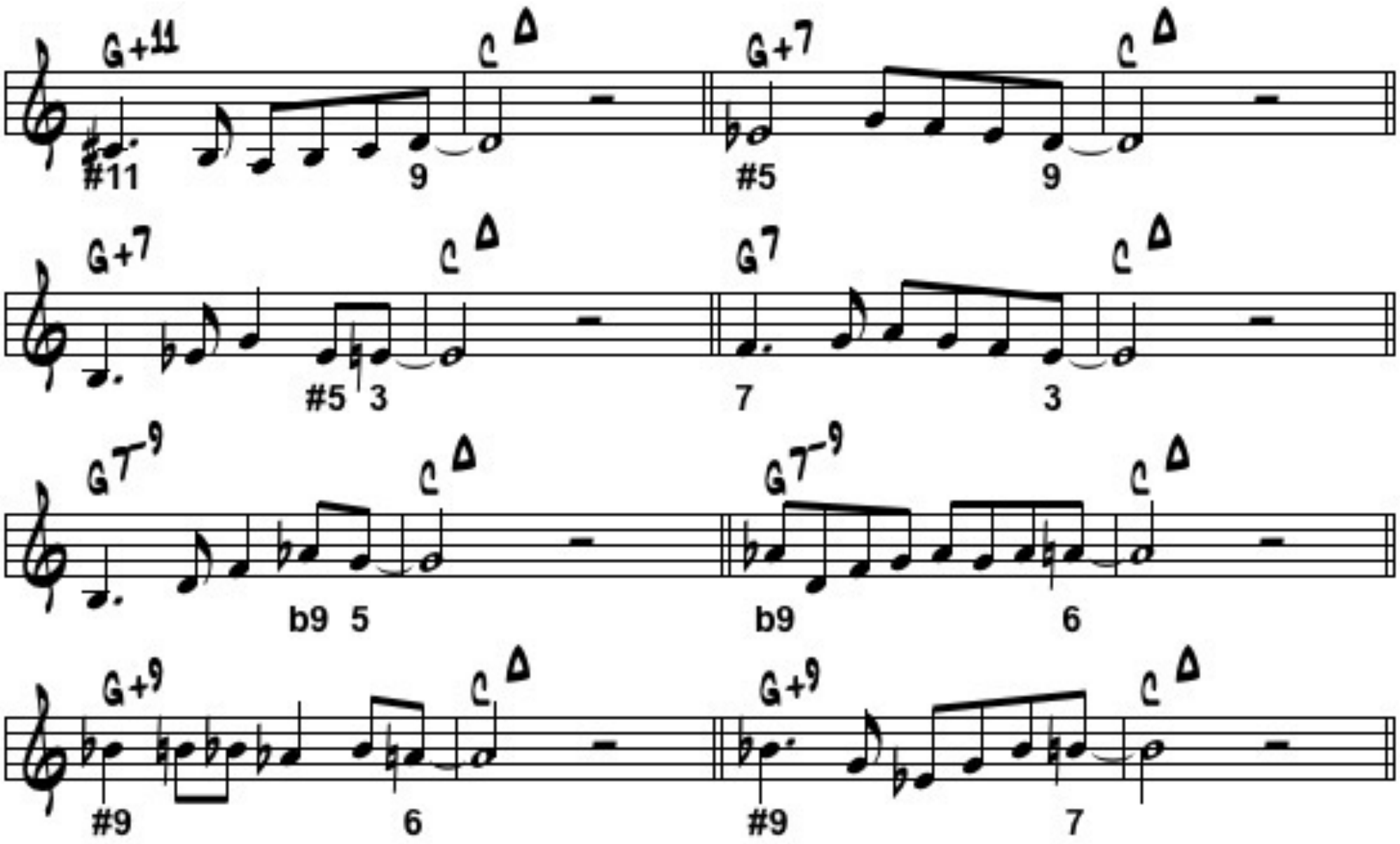
There are many choices of chord tones or altered chord tones of the V7 chords to which notes of the II-7 chords could move.


D-7
G7
D-7
G7
7
3
3
13
D-7
G7-9
D-7
G+7
5
b9
9
#5
D-7
G+9
D-7
G+11
5
#9
7
#11
D-7
G7-9
D-7
G+7
11
b9
1
#5

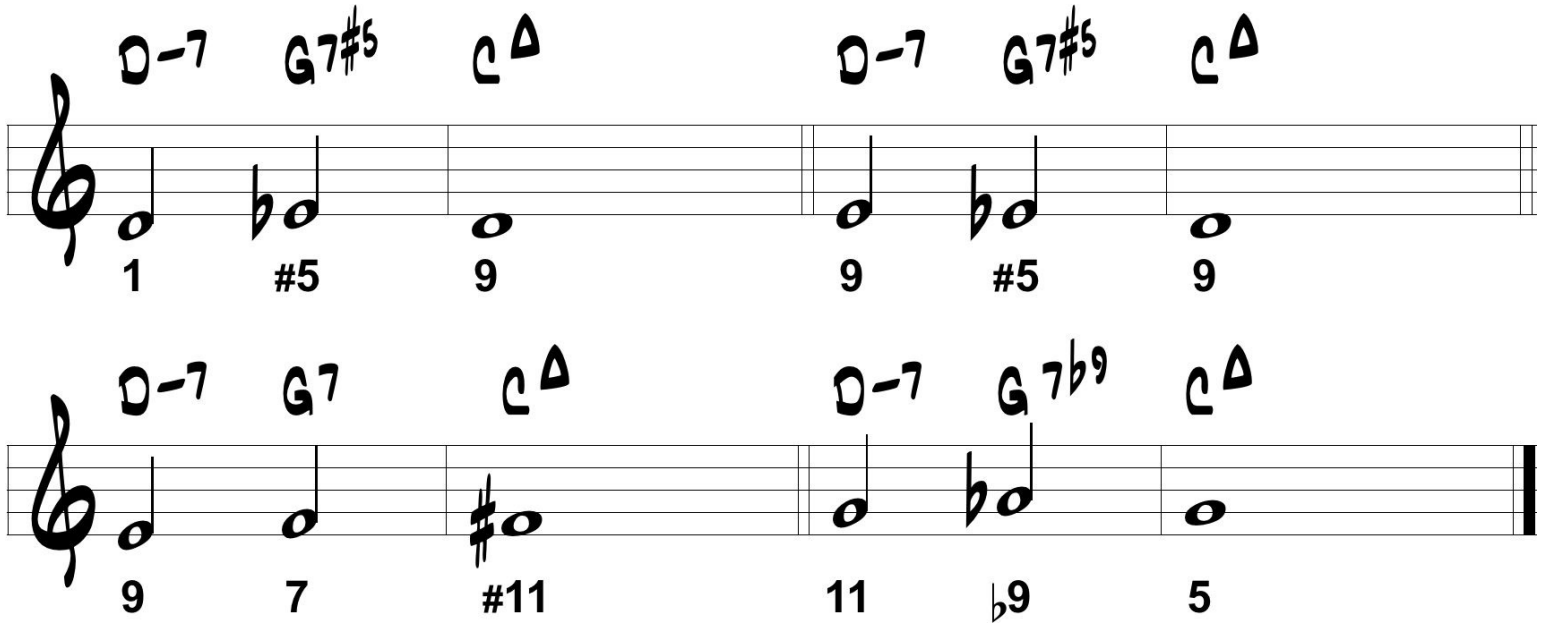
1/2 Step motion in V7 to I Progressions



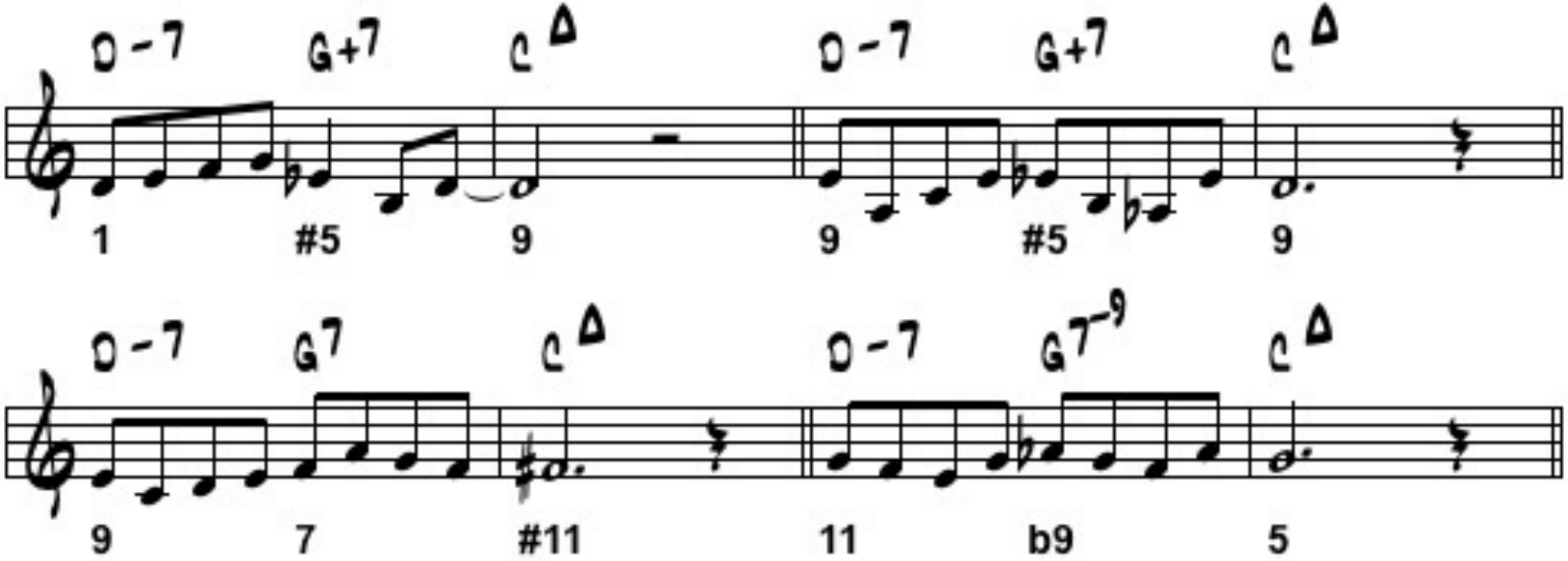
Altered chord tones of the V7 chords are very strong and can resolve a variety of ways!


G+11
#11
9
C Δ
G+7
#5
9
C Δ
G+7
#5
3
C Δ
G7
7
3
C Δ
G7-9
b9
5
C Δ
G7-9
b9
6
C Δ
G+9
#9
6
C Δ
G+9
#9
7
C Δ

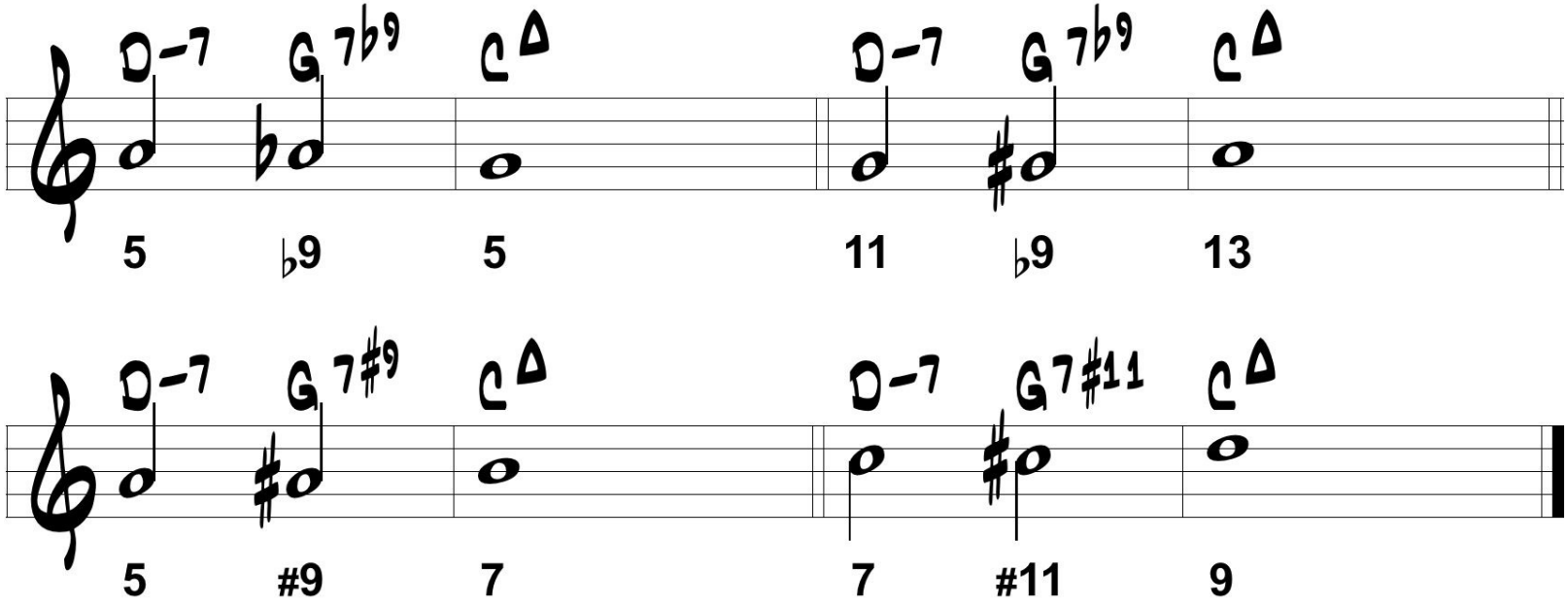
1/2 Step motion in II, V7, I Progressions

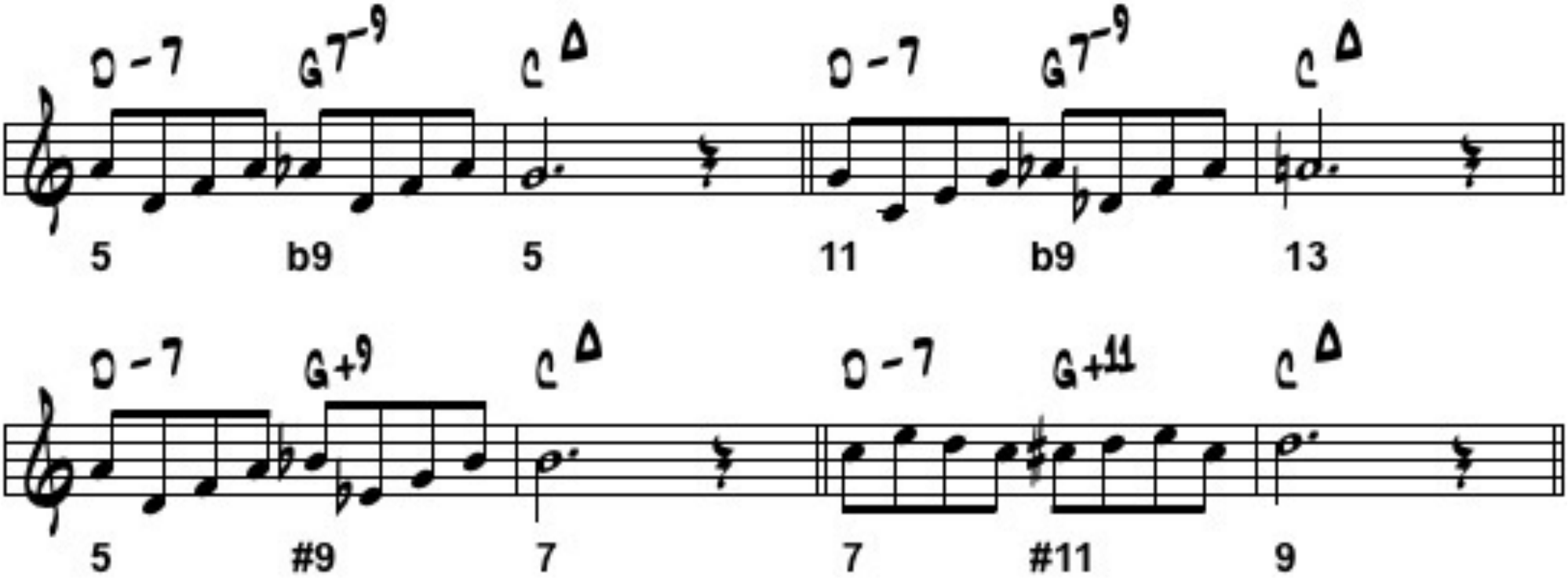


In II, V7, I progressions, there are many 1/2 step paths that can be created. These are the basis of guide tone lines.

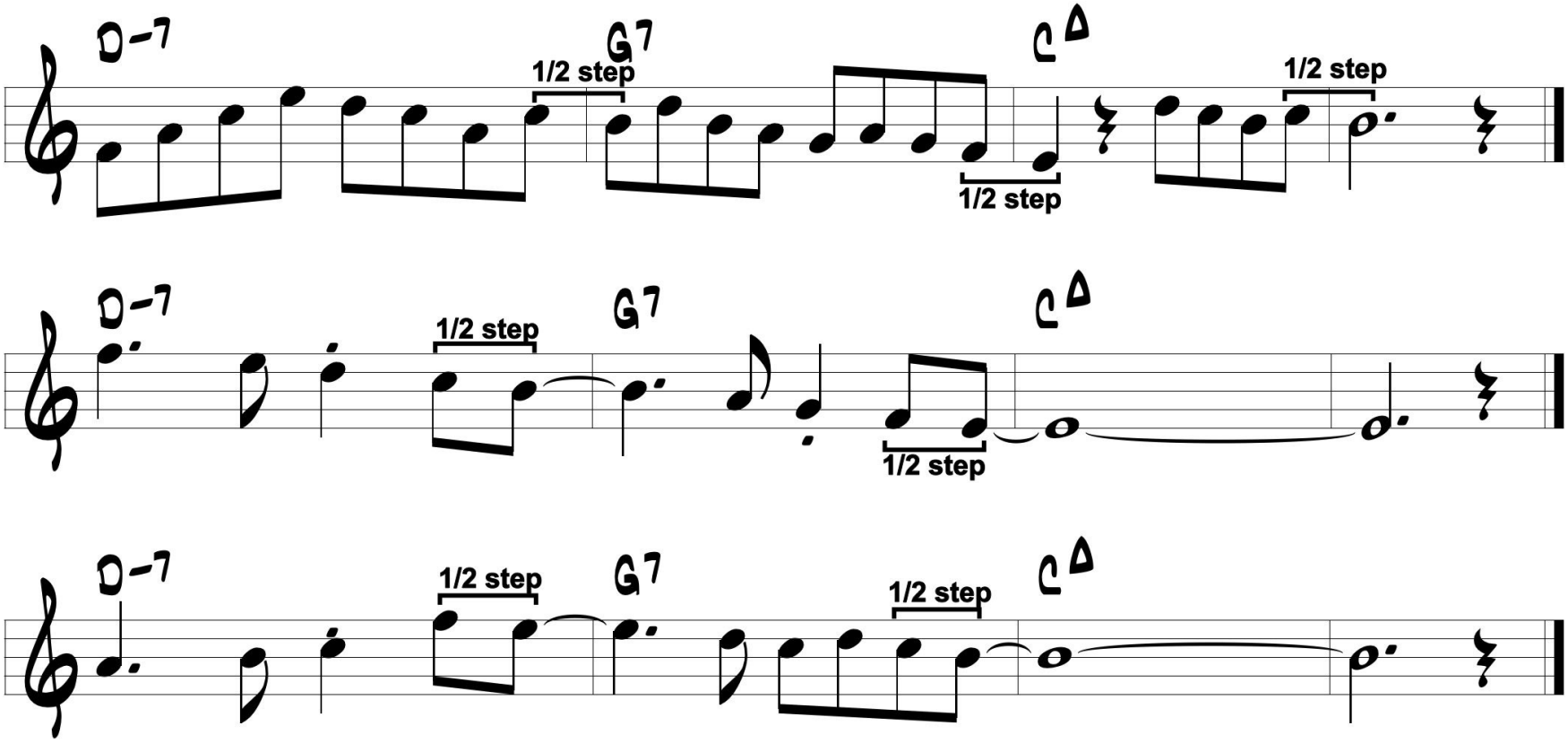

D-7 G+7 C Δ D-7 G+7 C Δ
1 #5 9 9 #5 9
D-7 G7 C Δ D-7 G7-9 C Δ
9 7 #11 11 b9 5

More 1/2 Step motion in II, V7, Is

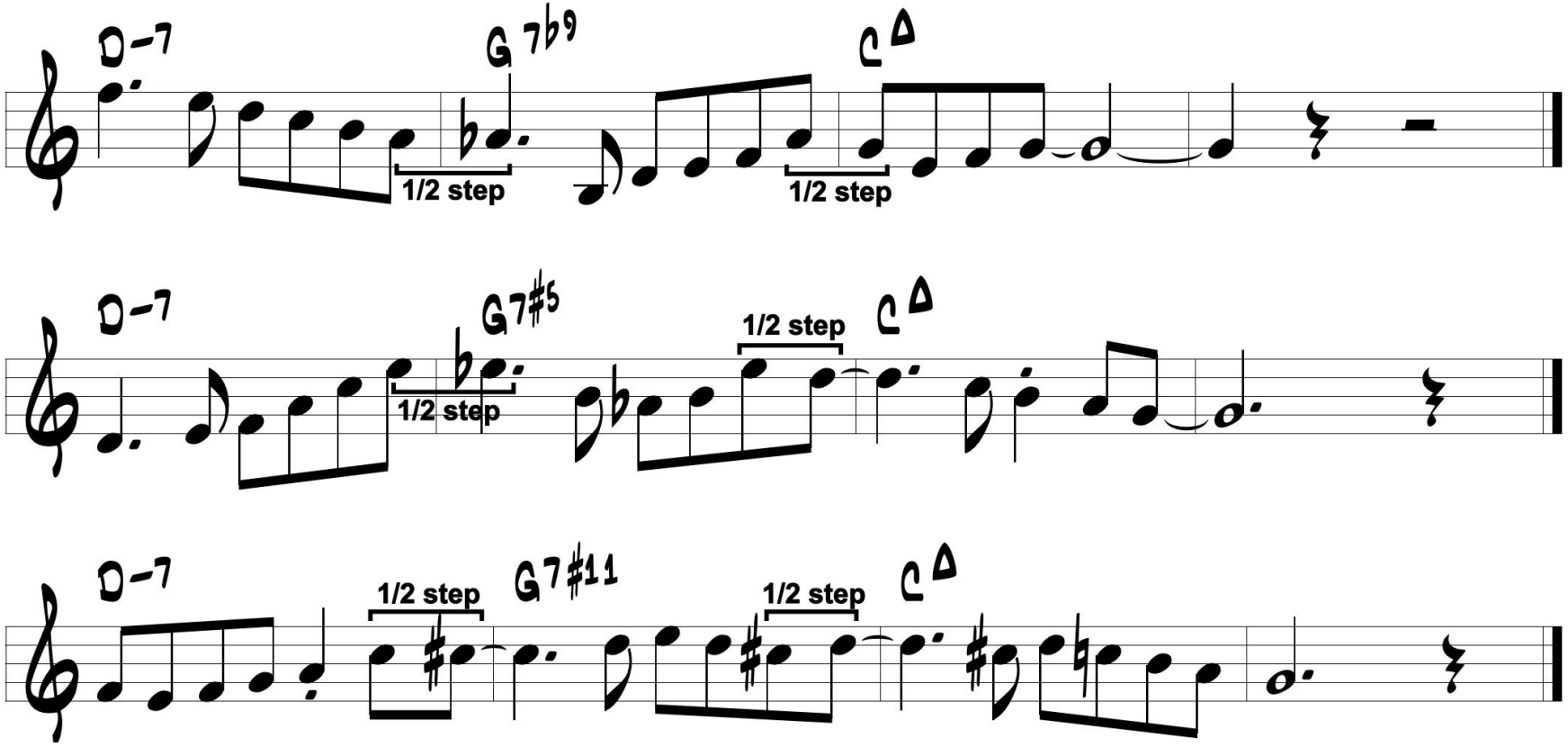



D-7
G7-9
C Δ
D-7
G7-9
C Δ
5
b9
5
11
b9
13
D-7
G+9
C Δ
D-7
G+11
C Δ
5
#9
7
7
#11
9

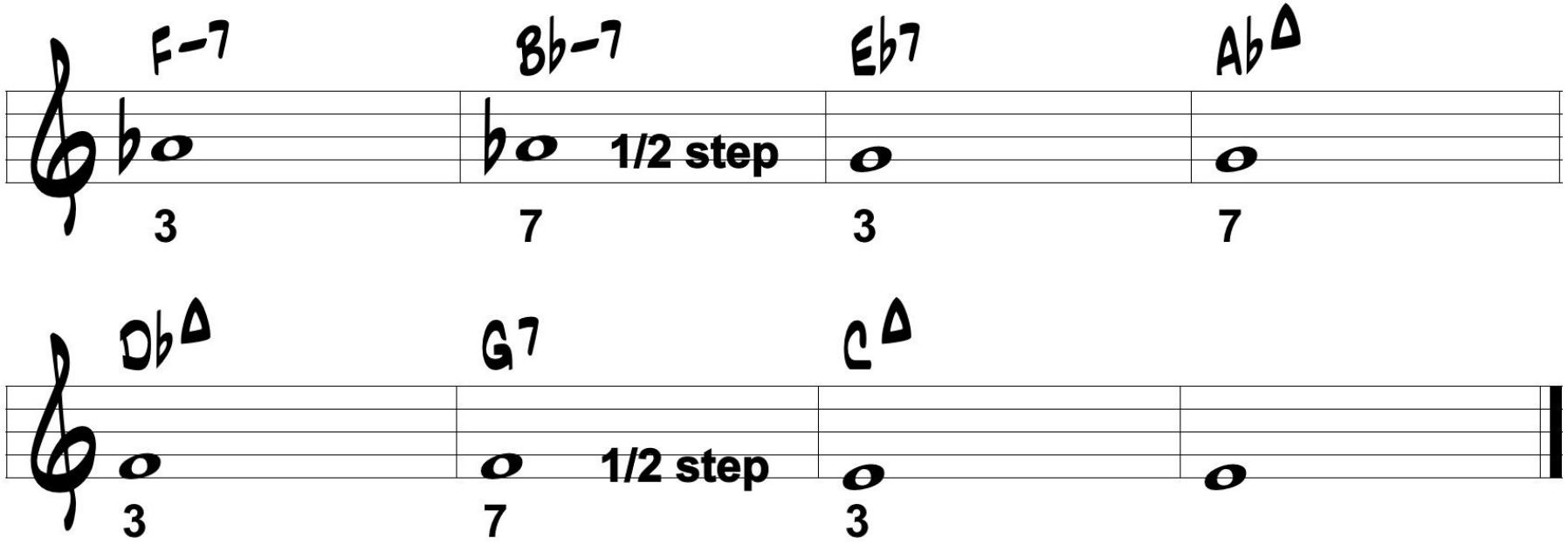
1/2 Step motion in a II, V7, I Melody



1/2 Step motion in a II, altered V7, I Melody

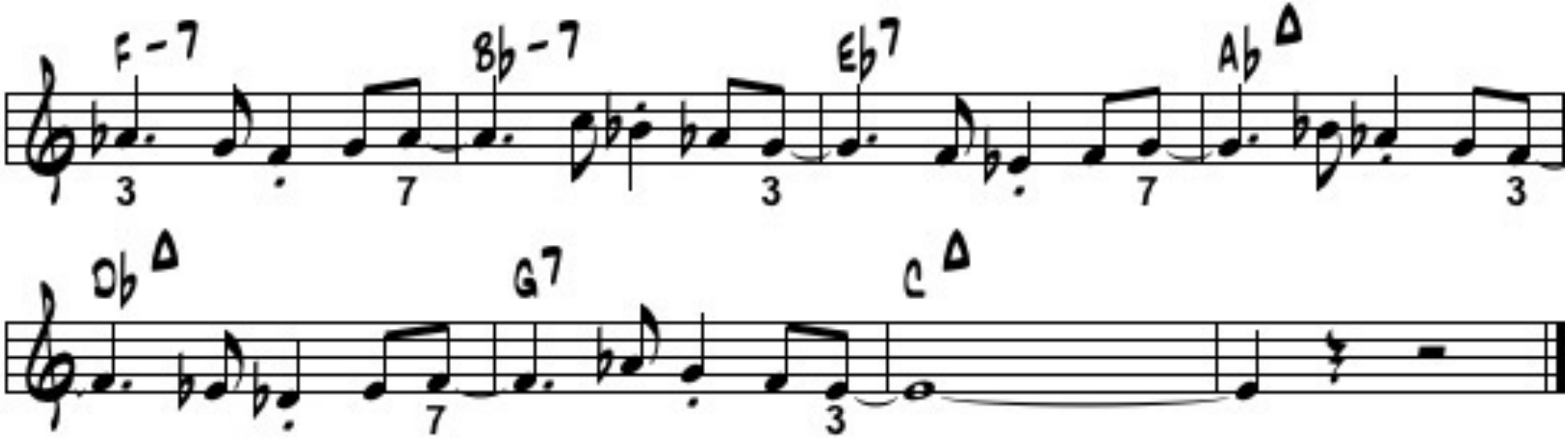


1/2 Step motion in a chord progression

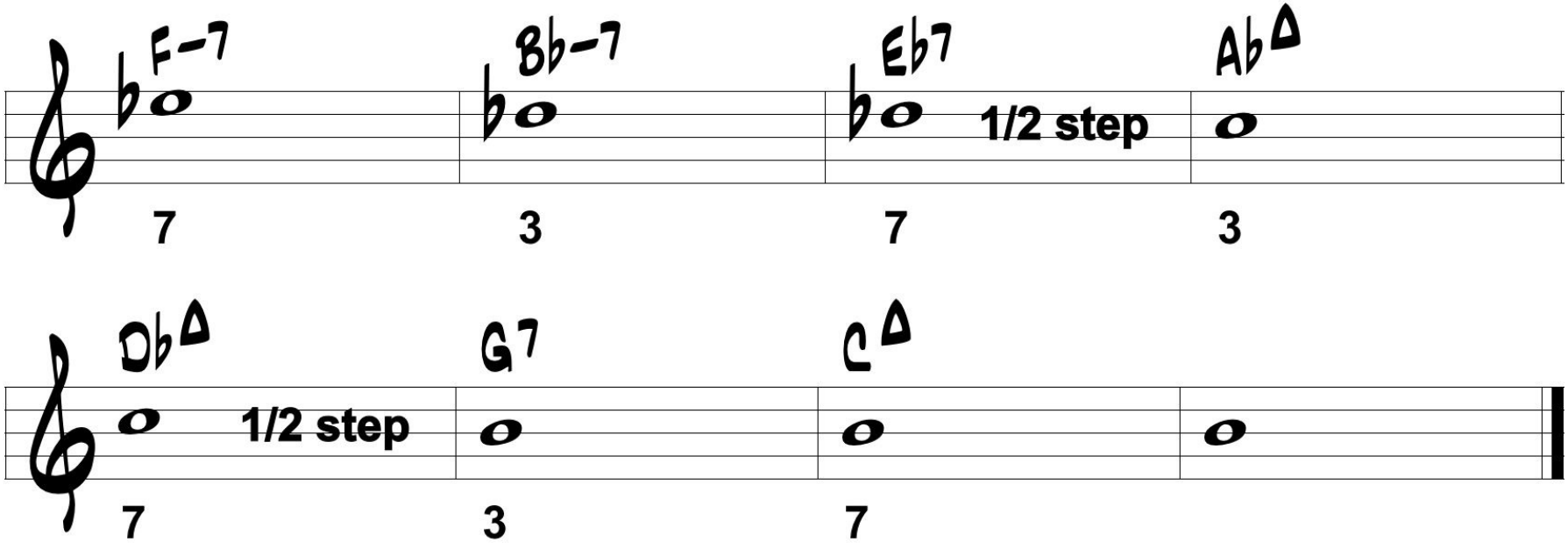


7th to 3rd resolutions are very strong and really what make a chord “progress” to the next chord!

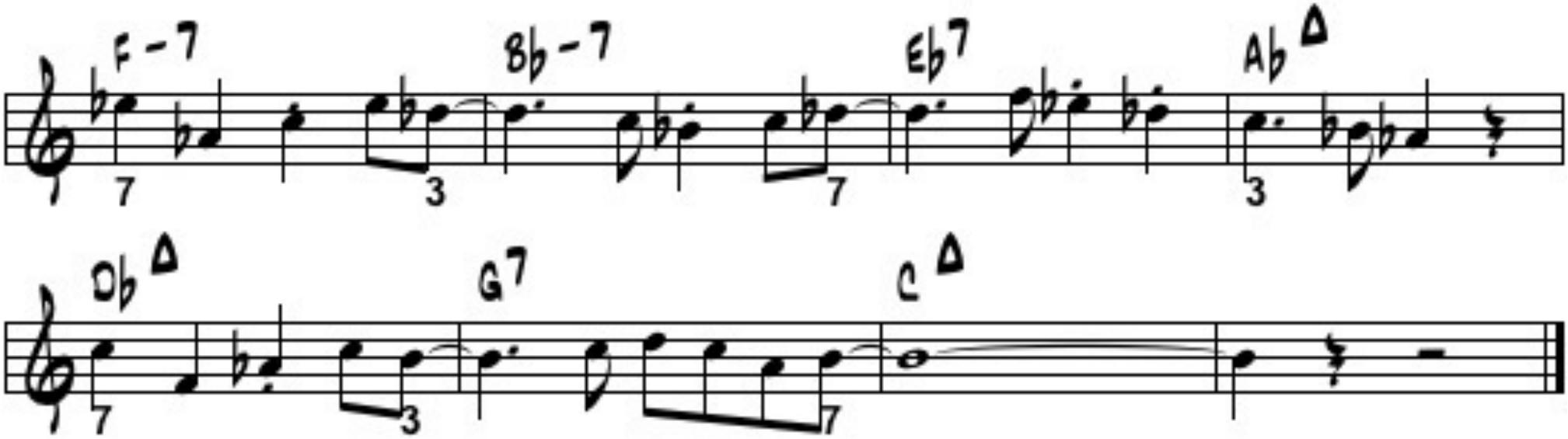
Improvisation based on the previous guide tones:



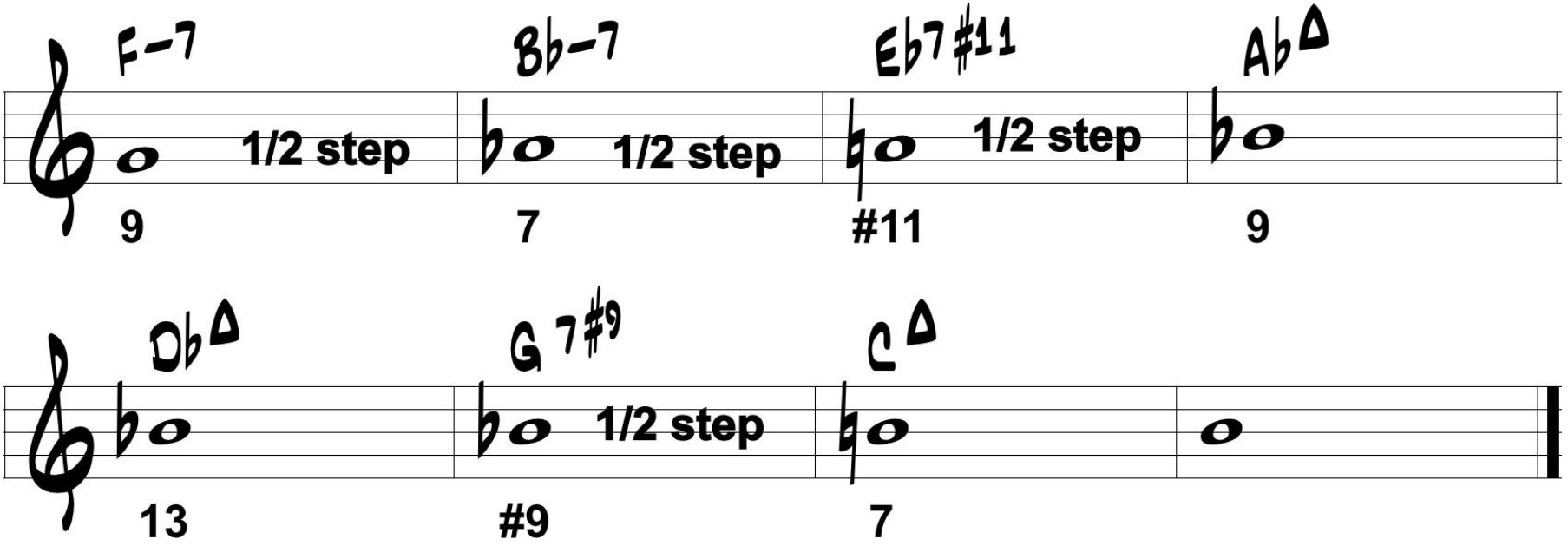
Here the 7th to 3rd resolution isn't as strong in the first two measures where it is whole step motion!



Improvisation based on the previous guide tones:

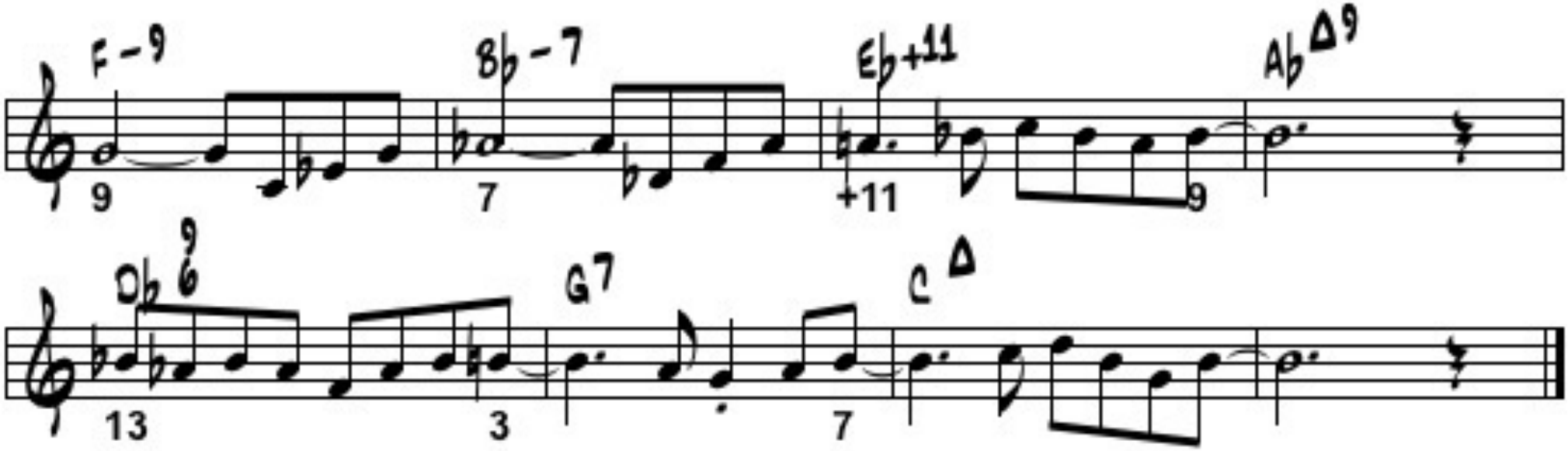


Here the half step motion is not 7th to 3rd but creates an ascending chromatic line and includes more half step motion!



Notice that the half step motion involves more extensions and alterations of the harmony.

Improvisation based on the previous guide tones:



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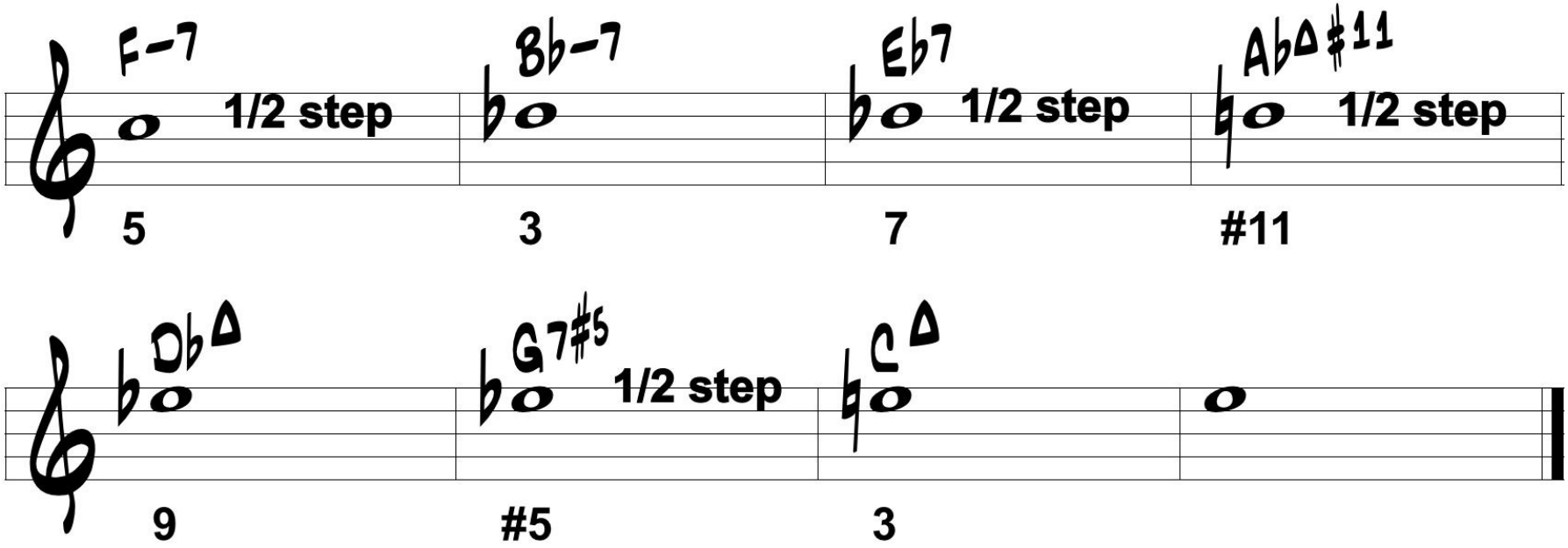
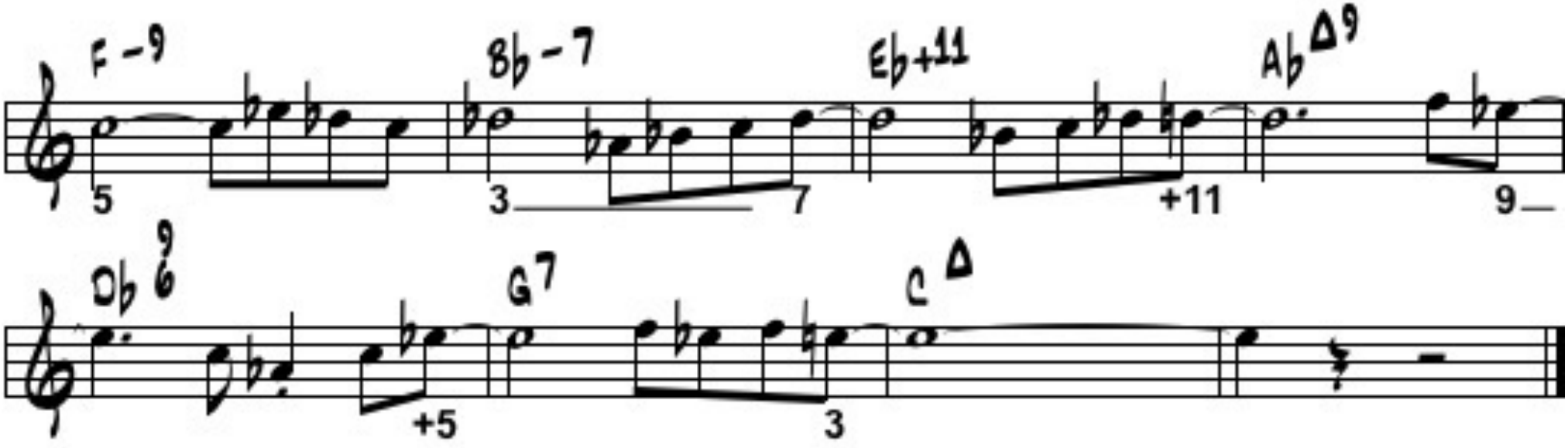


Improvisation based on the previous guide tones:



Shameless plug!

Dan Haerle has instructional videos

available through

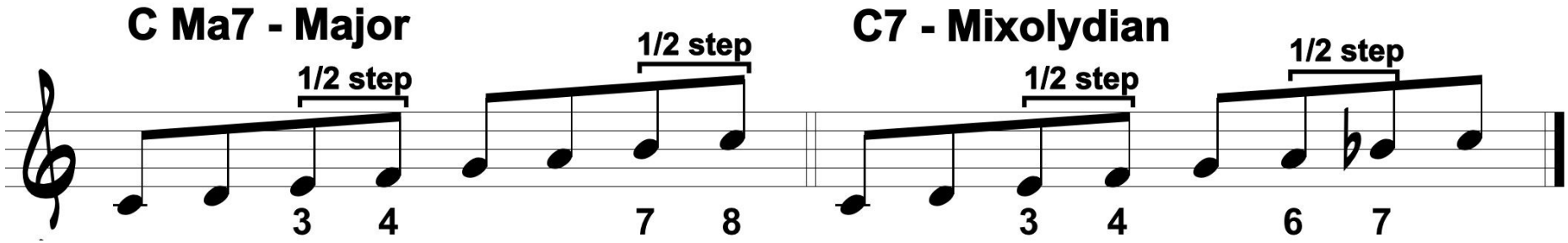
MyMusicMasterclass.com

1/2 Step Motion in Scales

The 1/2 steps within any scale involve tension and resolution! Of two notes located a 1/2 step apart, one will be more tense and one will be more relaxed. We like both for different reasons!

In general, basic scale notes like 1, 3, 5, 7 are chord tones of the related 7th chord and will be fairly consonant. Notes that are extensions or alterations of the related chord will tend to sound more dissonant. Sometimes it is purely a matter of personal taste.

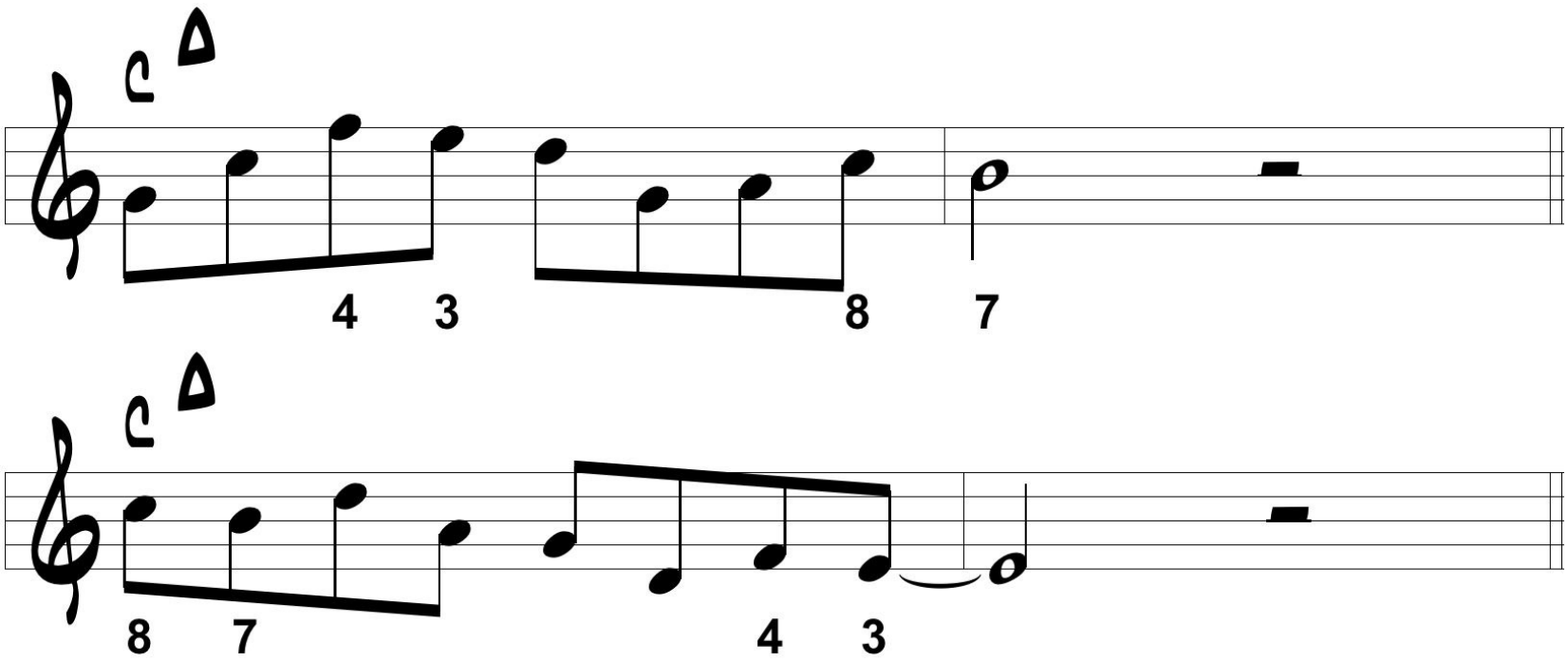
Scales with two half steps



In both of these scales, the 4th is very dissonant and needs to resolve to the 3rd. That's what I call the "Amen" of jazz. Many cliches are based on this.

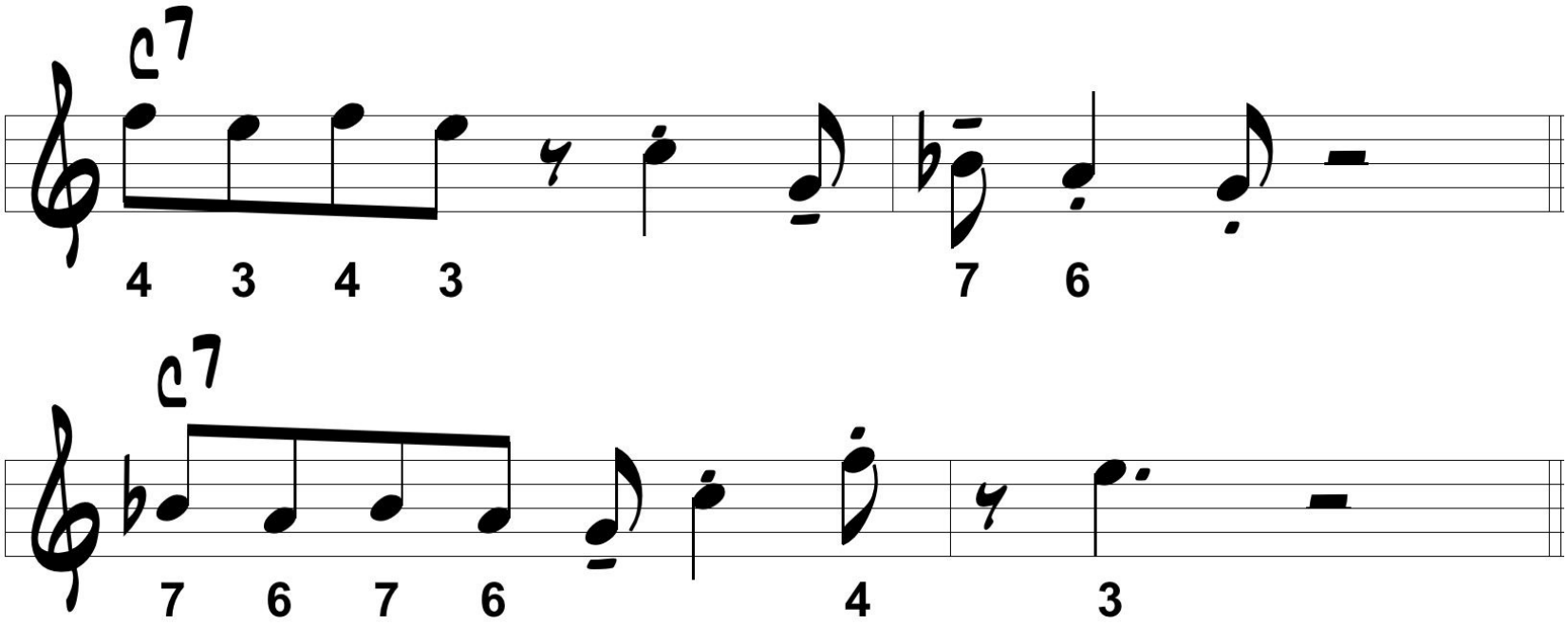
In the Major scale, the 8th scale step is dissonant and wants to move to the 7th which is an important tone in a Major 7th chord. The 6th of the Mixolydian scale is actually the 13th and may seem more dissonant than the 7th which is a basic note in a Dominant 7th chord.

Major Scale Melodies



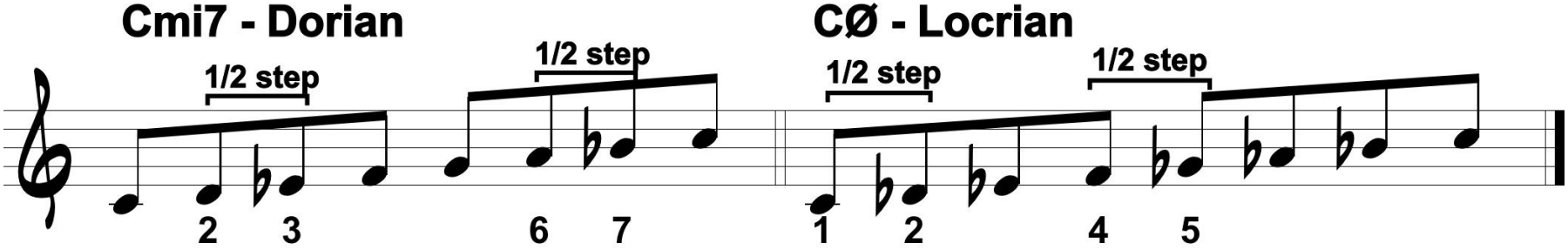
Note the emphasis on 4 to 3 or 8 to 7 motion in the melodies!

Mixolydian Scale Melodies



Note the emphasis on 4 to 3 or
7 to 6 (13) motion in the melodies!

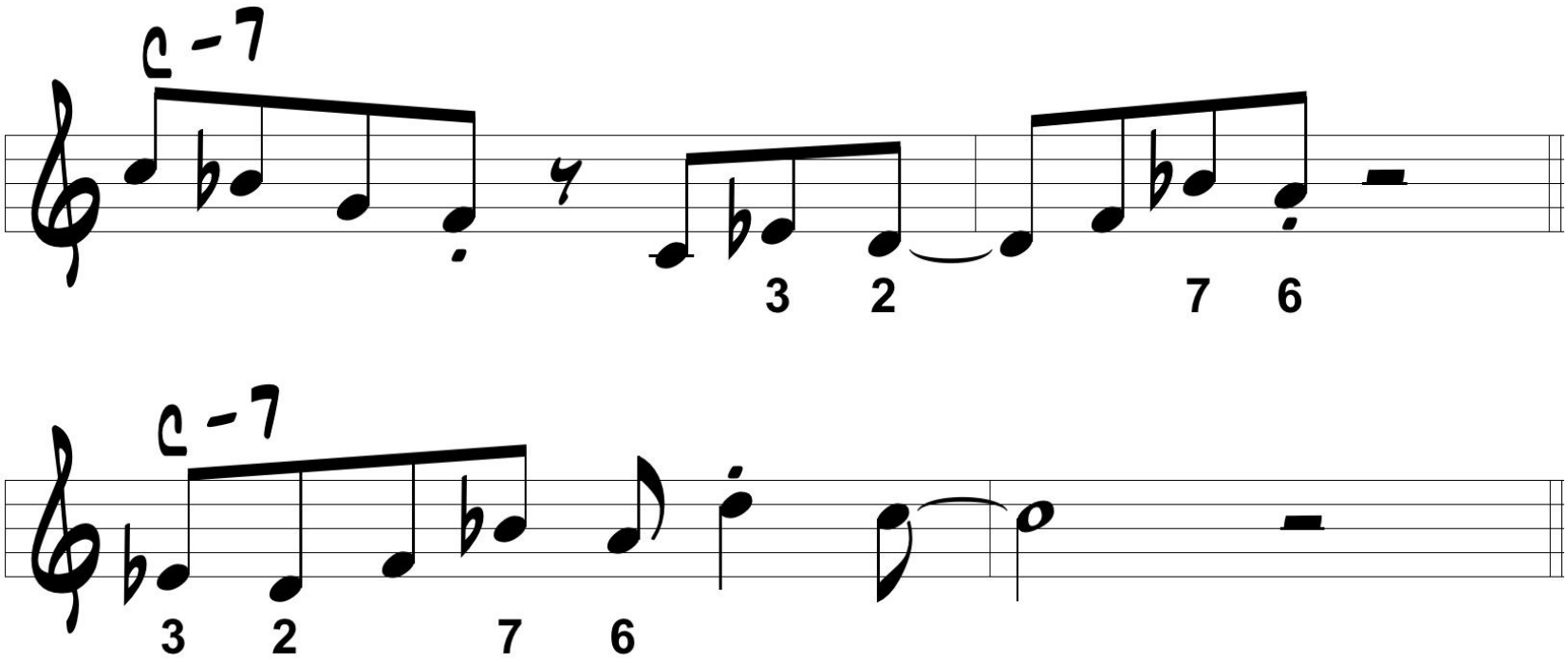
Scales with two half steps, continued



All of the notes of a Dorian scale are chord tones of a Minor 13th chord. The 2nd is really the 9th and the 6th is really the 13th. Both of these notes are more dissonant than the 3rd or 7th so it is a matter of taste which to use.

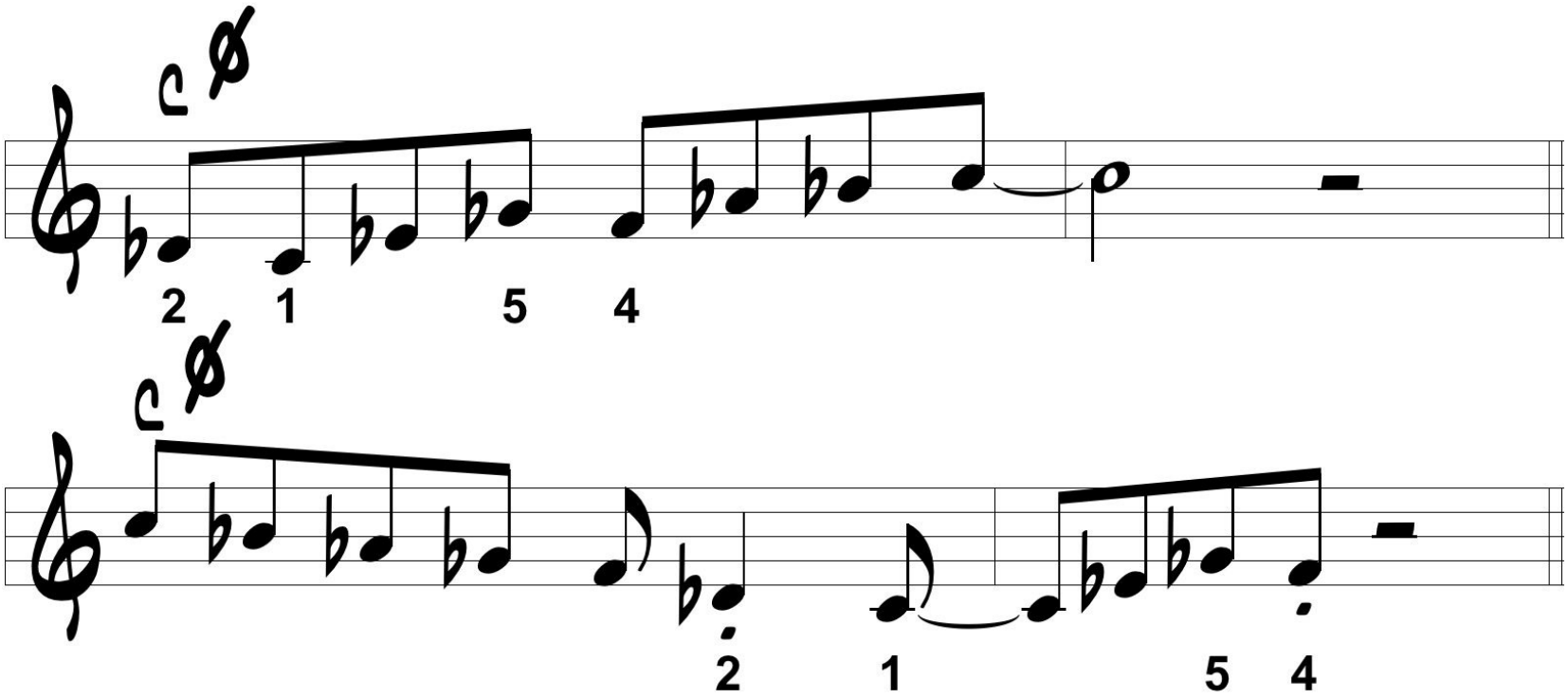
In the Locrian scale, the 2nd scale step is very dissonant and wants to move to 1 much like the "Amen" resolution in a Major scale. The 4th is really an 11th and may seem more dissonant than the 5th.

Dorian Scale Melodies



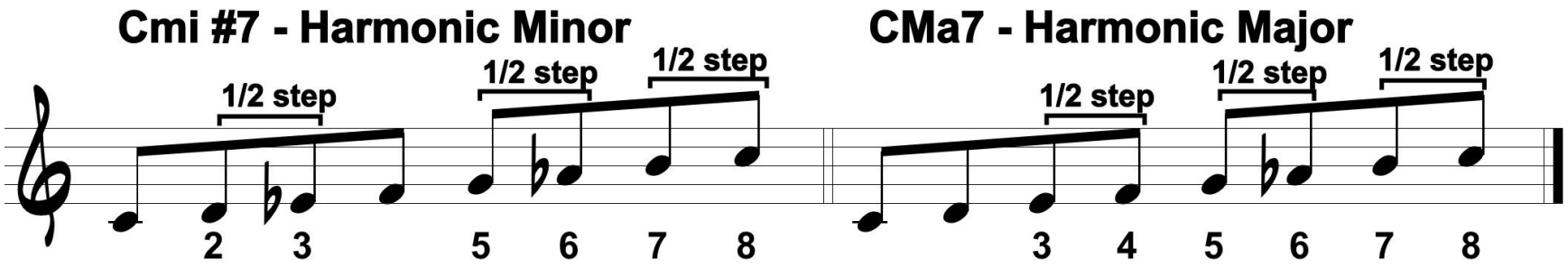
Note the emphasis on 3 to 2 (9) or 7 to 6 (13) motion in the melodies!

Locrian Scale Melodies



Note the emphasis on 2 to 1 or
5 to 4 (11) motion in the melodies!

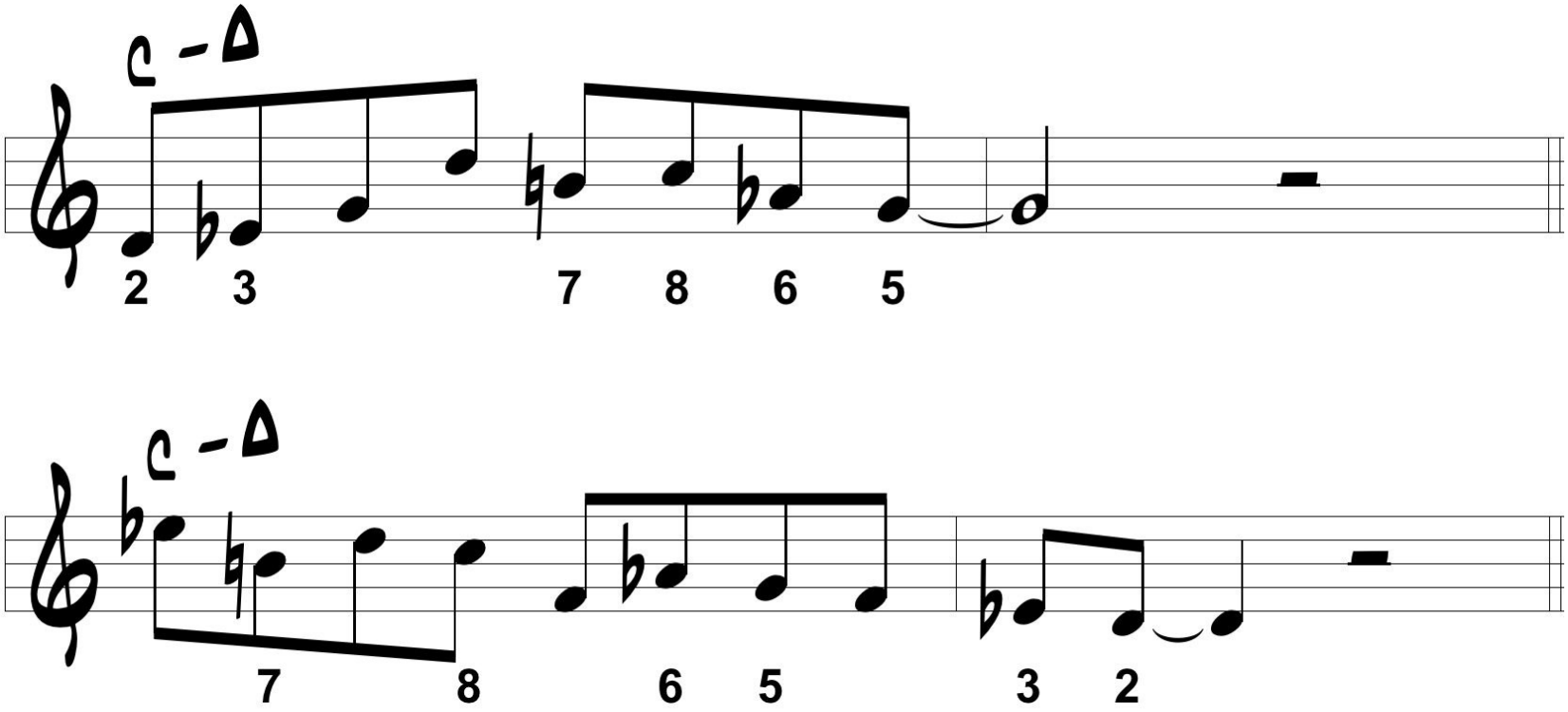
Scales with three half steps



In both of these scales, the 6th is very dissonant and needs to resolve to the 5th. In both scales the 8th is dissonant and wants to resolve to the 7th, an important chord tone.

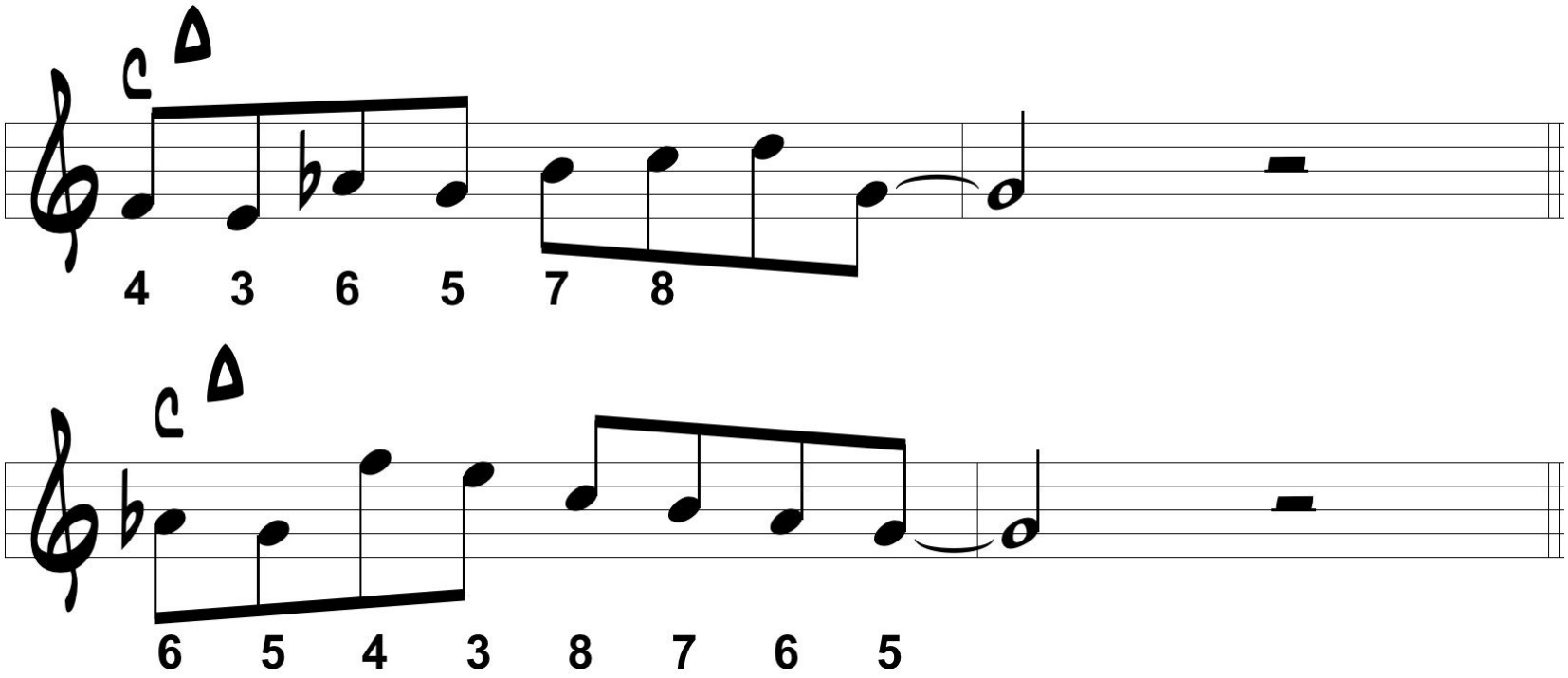
In the Harmonic Major, the 4th needs to resolve to the 3rd (Amen). In the Harmonic Minor scale, the 2nd scale step is the 9th and is more dissonant than the 3rd.

Harmonic Minor Scale Melodies



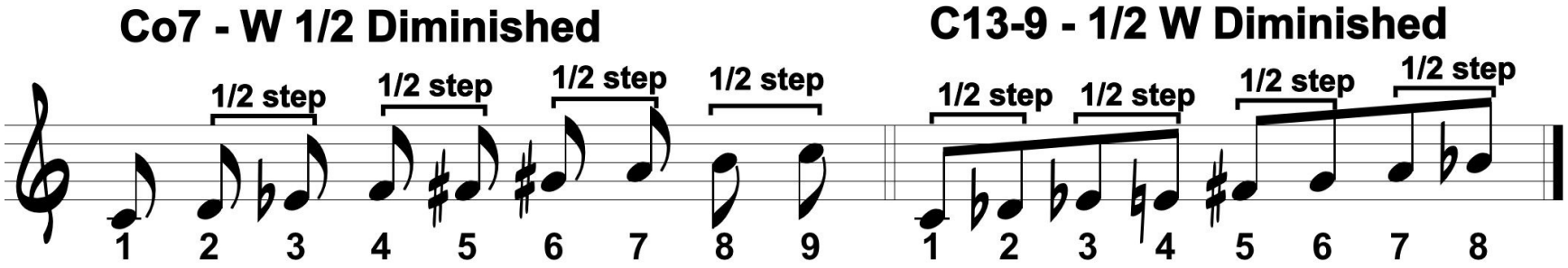
Note the emphasis on 7 to 8 or 6 to 5 motion in the melodies! The motion between 7 & 8 and 2 & 3 can be either direction.

Harmonic Major Scale Melodies



Note the emphasis on 7 to 8 or 6 to 5 motion in the melodies! the motion between 7 & 8 can be either direction.

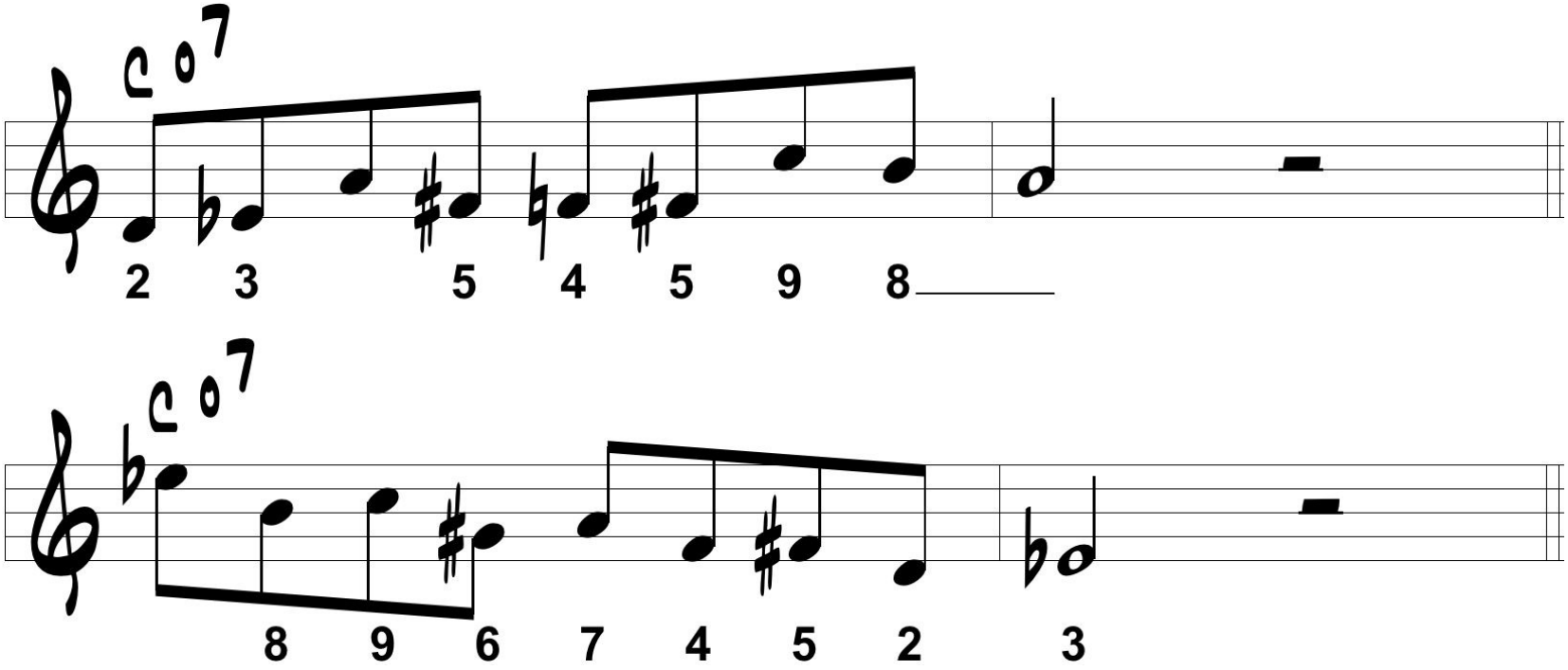
Scales with four half steps



In the W 1/2 Diminished scale, the 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th notes are chord tones and relatively calm. The 2nd, 4th, 6th and 8th notes are color tones that are pseudo extensions and more colorful tending to resolve upwards.

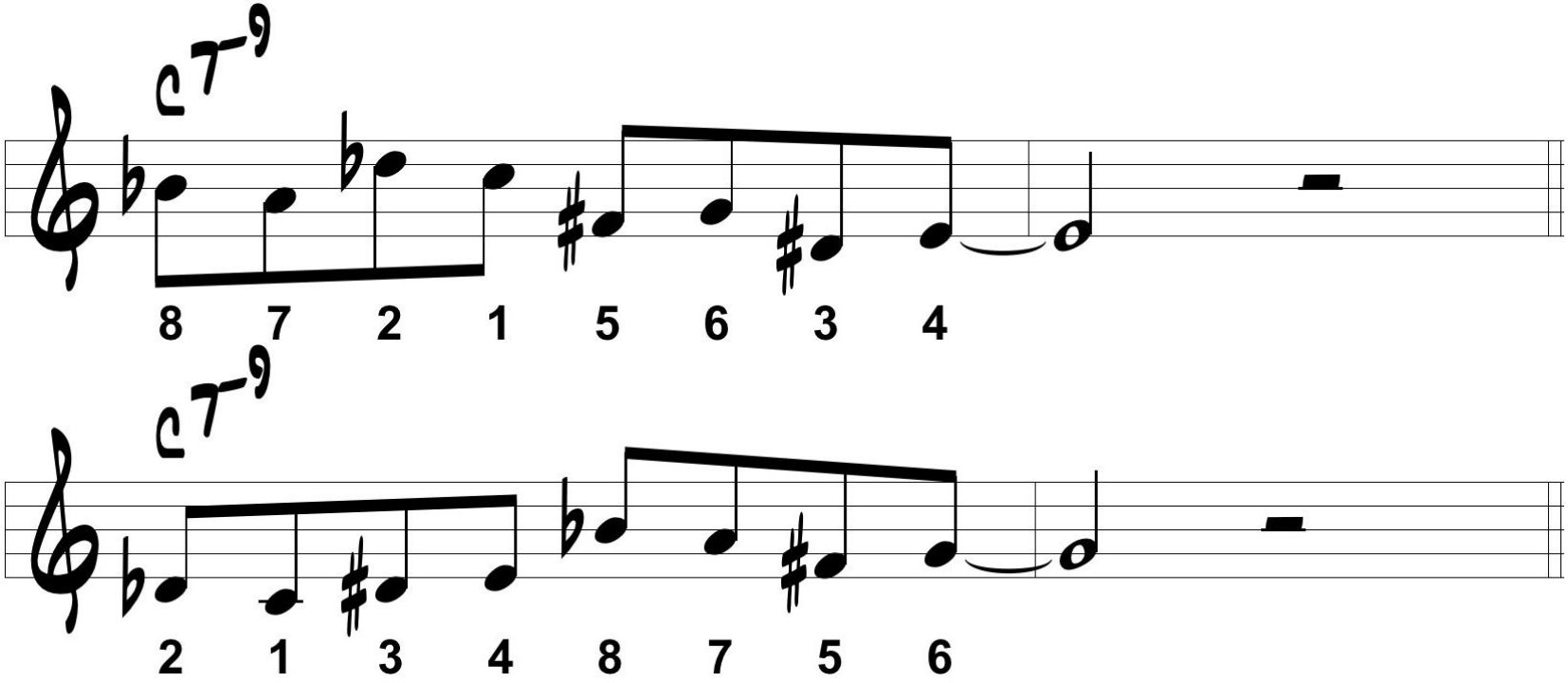
All of the notes of the 1/2 W Diminished scale are chord tones or altered chord tones: 1, b9, #9, 3, #11, 5, 13, 7. The alterations and extensions will tend to sound more dissonant than the root, 3rd, 5th and 7th.

W H Diminished Scale Melodies



Note that the 1/2 step motion could be in either direction depending on whether you want emphasis on the basic chord tone or the “extensions.”

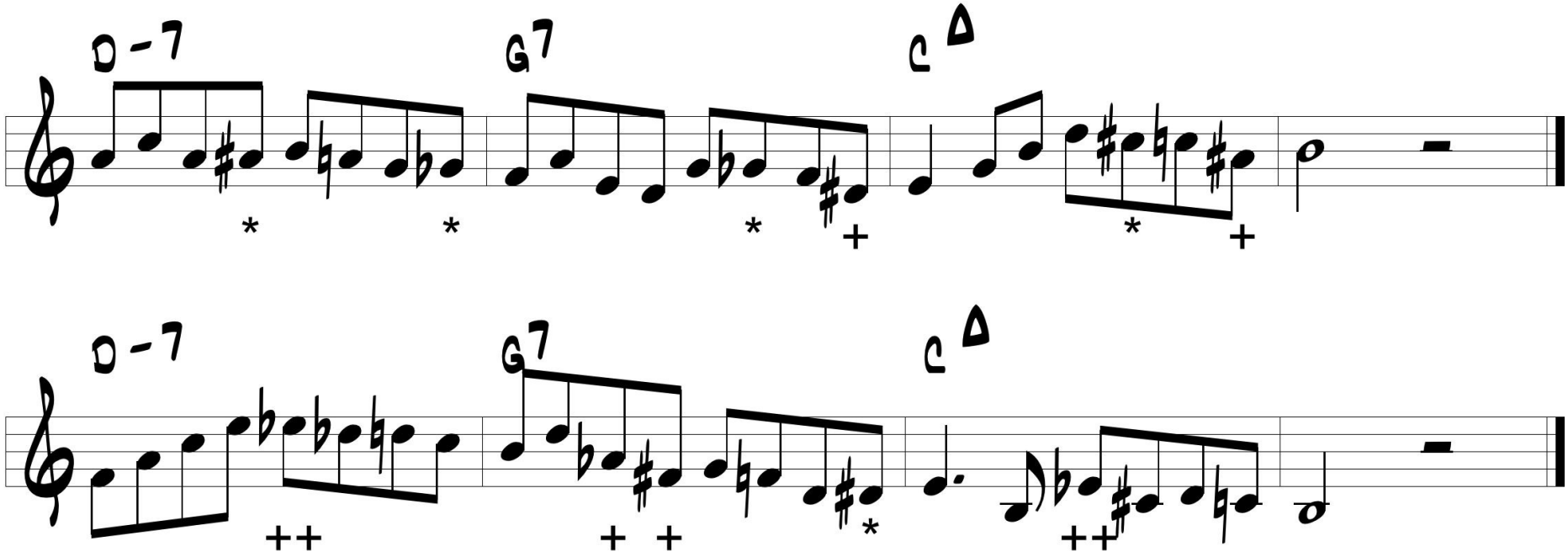
H W Diminished Scale Melodies



Since all the notes are chord tones or alterations, the 1/2 step motion could be in either direction depending on where you want the emphasis.

Chromatic embellishing tones

*** = passing tone, + = approach tone, # = neighboring tone**



Chromatic embellishing tones

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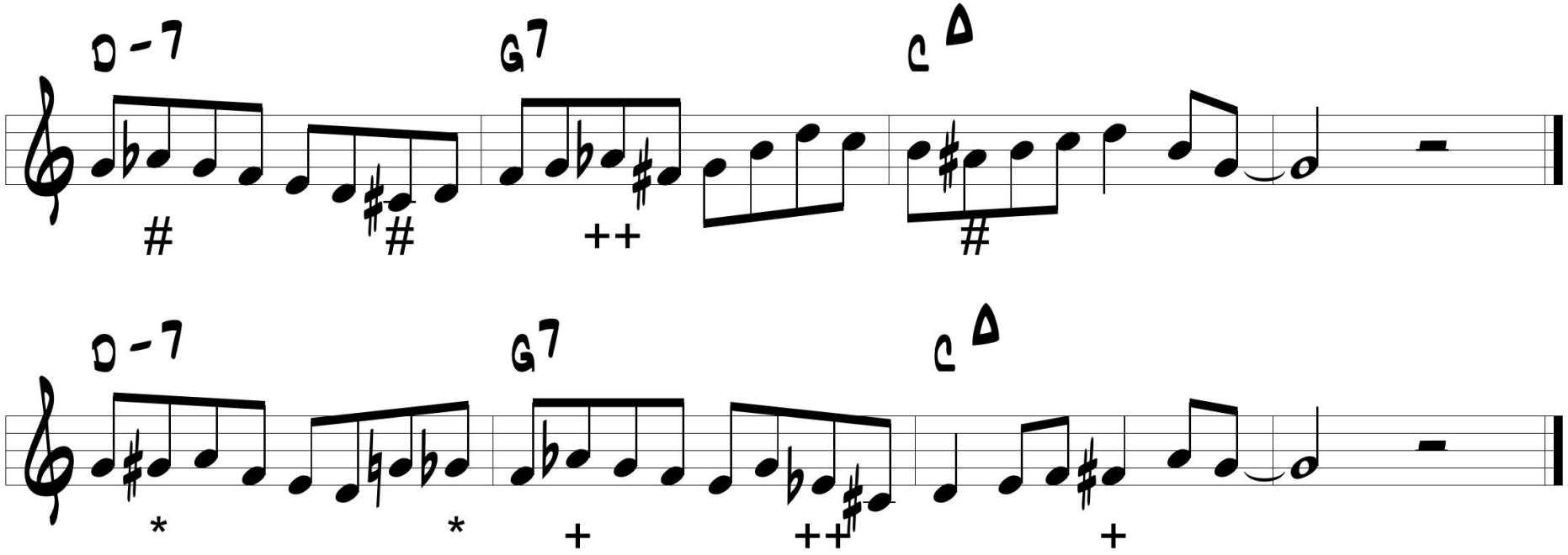
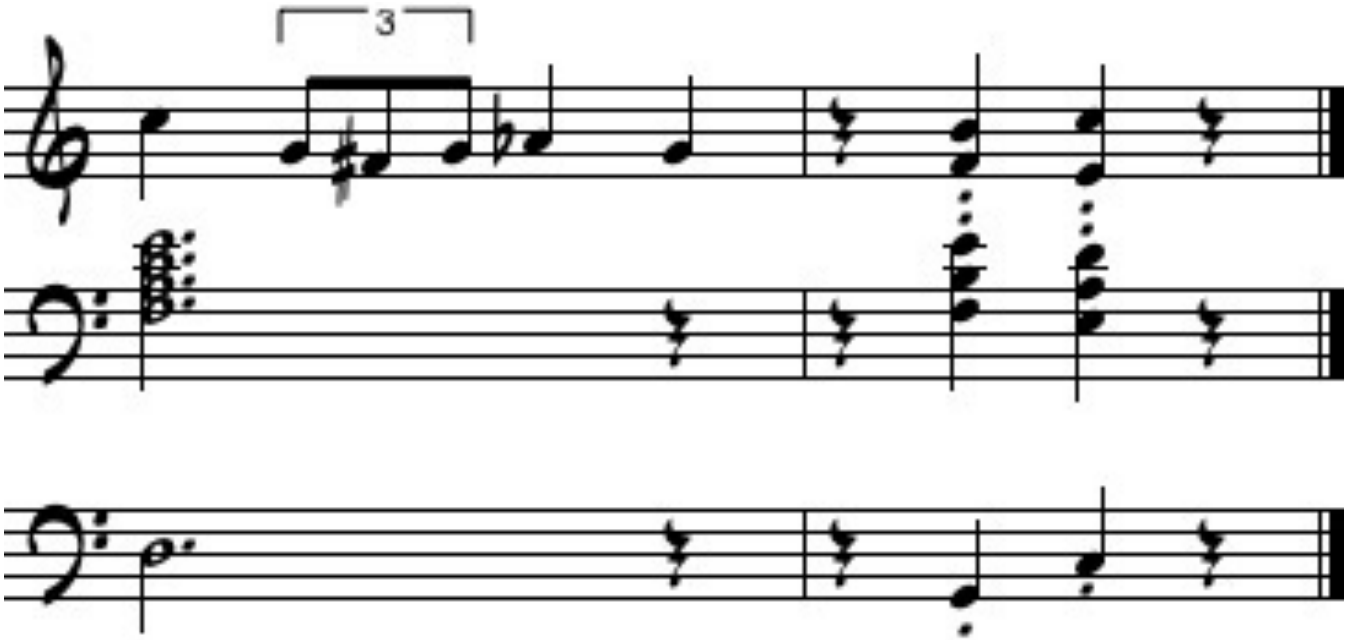
Thanks for coming! See you later!