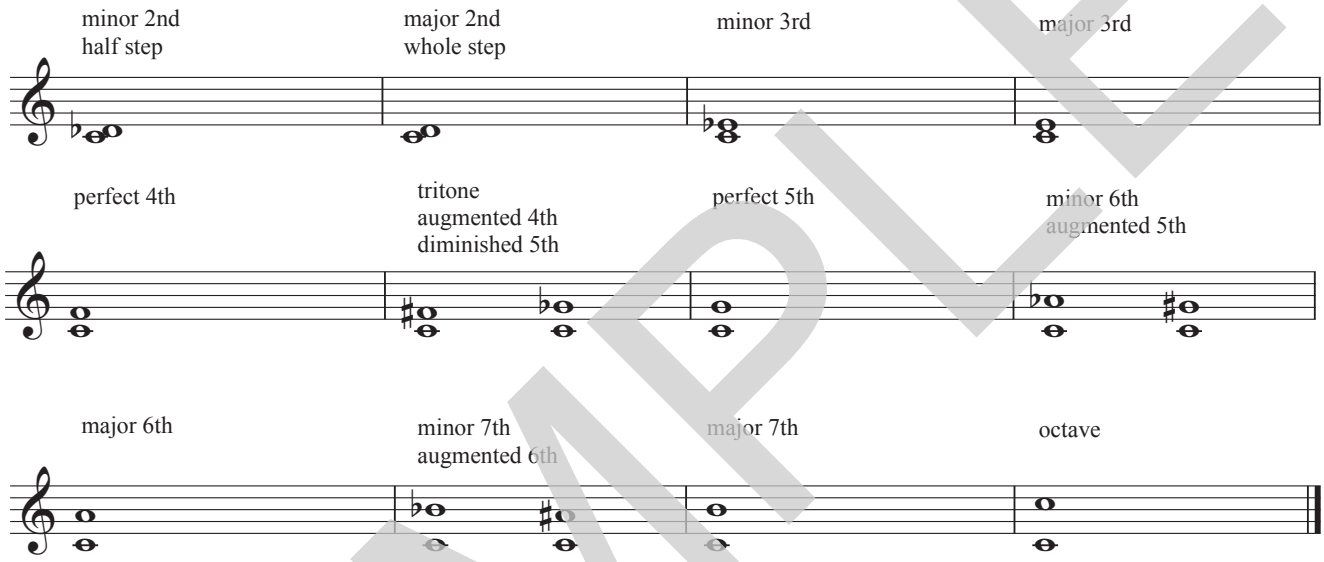
The Jazz Piano Book by Mark Levine

CHAPTER ONE
Intervals and Triads — Review

Intervals

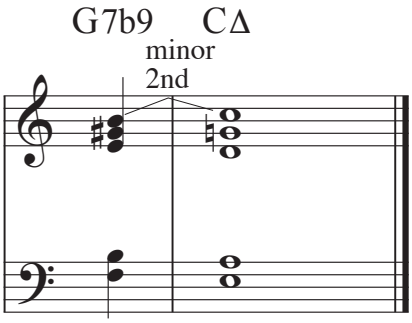
A good definition of an *interval* is "the space between two notes." **Figure 1-1** shows the intervals from the half step/minor second up to the octave, all based on middle C. The most commonly used term is shown above each interval, along with any alternate terms.

Figure 1-1

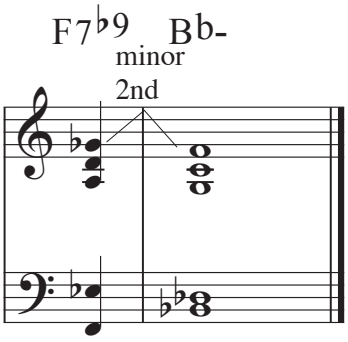


The chart that follows shows all the intervals, both ascending and descending, as they occur in tunes from the standard jazz repertoire. Unless otherwise noted, the interval in question is the first two melody notes of the song. Play each example and *sing* the interval. If you can sing an interval accurately, it will be easier to play when improvising. Listen carefully to all the voicings in the examples. All of them will be covered in this book. A footnote reference after each song title lists a great recording of the tune—in many cases, the original recording.

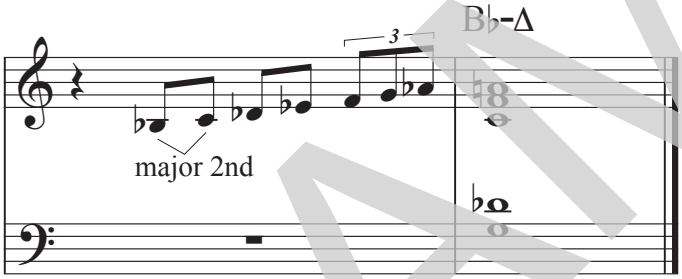
Intervals by selected tunes



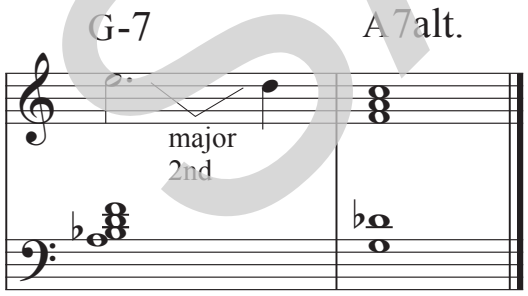
ascending minor second
Bob Haggart's "What's New?"[1]



descending minor second
Duke Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady"[2]



ascending major second
Billy Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge"[3]



descending major second
Miles Davis' "Blue In Green"[4]

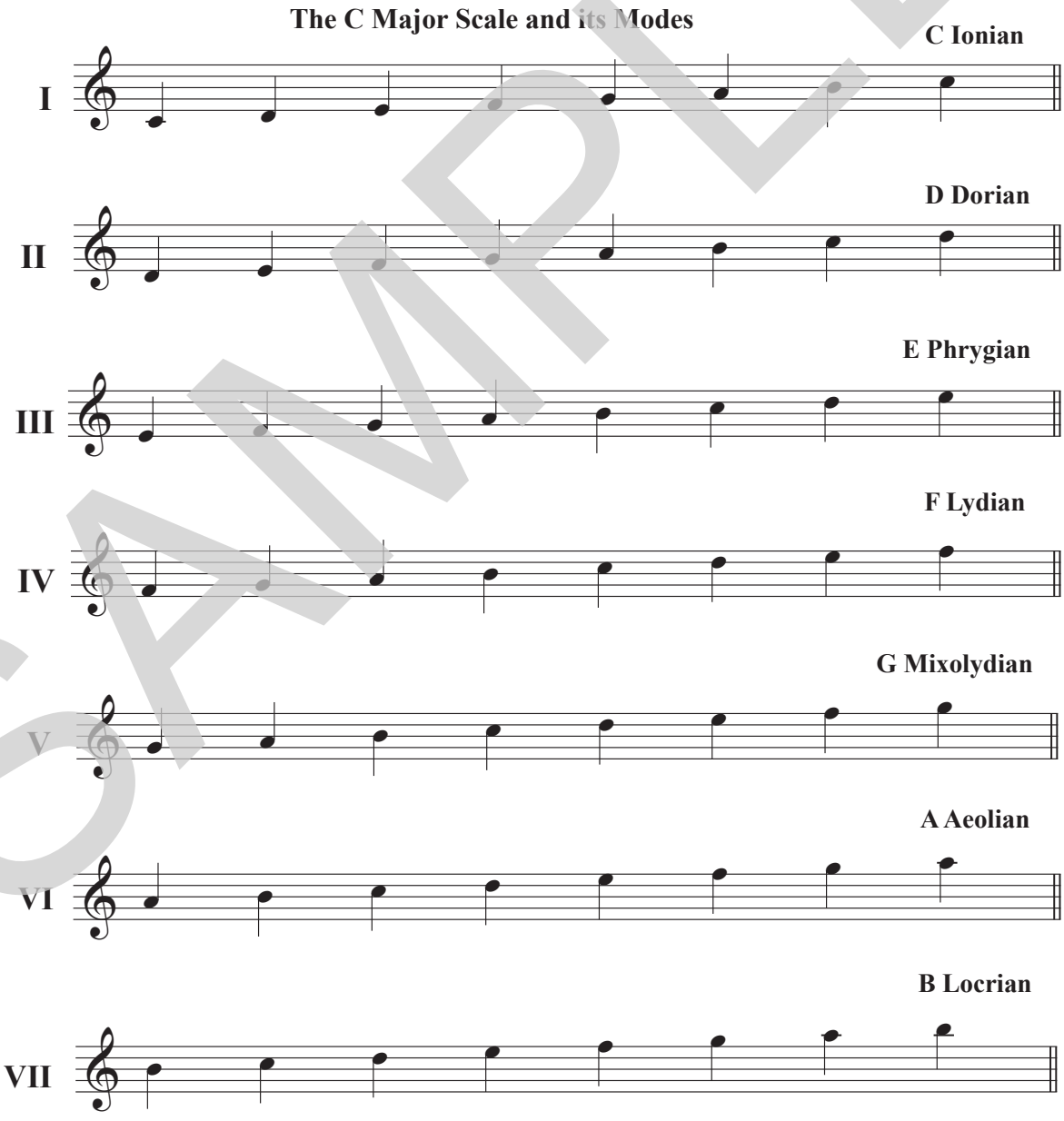
[1] Woody Shaw, *Setting Standards,* Muse 53l8.
[2] Duke Ellington and Ray Brown, *This One's For Blanton,* Pablo 23l0-72l.
[3] Joe Henderson, *The Kicker,* Milestone 9008.
[4] Miles Davis, *Kind Of Blue,* Columbia 40579.

CHAPTER TWO

The Major Modes and II-V-I

The basic chords played in jazz harmony come from the major scale. **Figure 2-1** shows the C major scale and all of its *modes*. Each mode starts on a different note of the the major scale. The Greek names for these modes, in use for over two thousand years, are shown on the right. The Roman numerals I through VII are on the left, and correspond to the modal names on the right. In other words, Ionian is always the I mode, Dorian is always II, Phrygian is always III, and so on, the same in every major key.

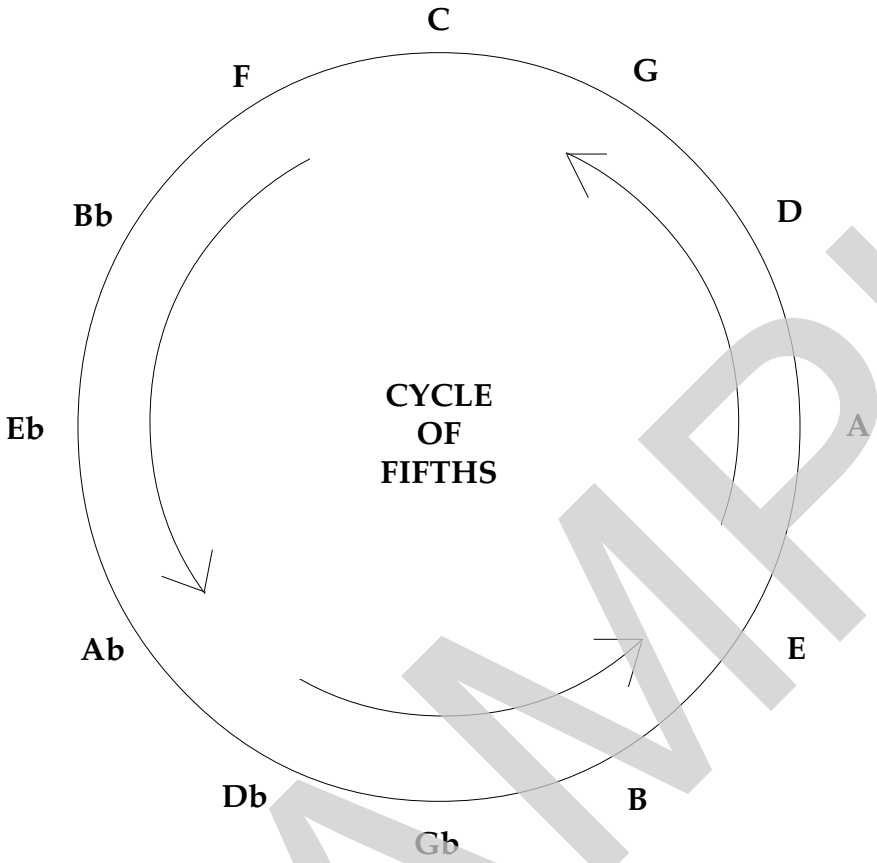
Figure 2-1



a half step while moving your left hand to the new root, C, and you've completed the II-V-I in C major.

Notice that *the seventh always comes down a half step.* Play the II-V-I progression a few more times, not looking at the music. Now try it in all twelve keys. To do this, use the *cycle of fifths*[1] **(figure 3-3)**.

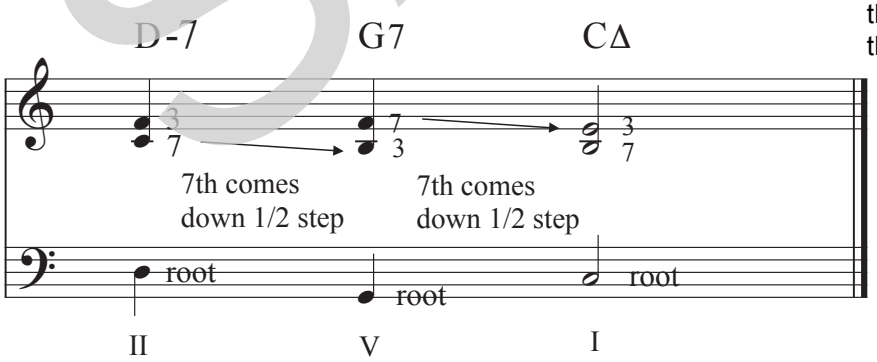
Figure 3-3



The cycle of fifths is an arrangement of all twelve notes of the chromatic scale, each note a fifth lower (or a fourth higher), than the preceding one. As you go around the cycle, think of each note as representing a key, the key you're going to practice in next. Start with the key of C at the top of the circle, and move counterclockwise through the keys of F, Bb, Eb, and so on. Using the cycle ensures that you practice everything in every key. More importantly, it means that your practicing approximates what happens in real life, because many chord progressions and modulations within tunes follow the cycle. For instance, the roots of a II-V-I progression follow the cycle. In the key of C, the roots of the II-V-I (D-7, G7, CΔ) are D, G, and C, which follow each other counterclockwise around the cycle. In F, the roots of the II-V-I (G-7, C7, FΔ) are G, C, and F, and they, too, follow each other around the cycle.

After you've gone through all twelve keys, reverse the notes in the right hand, starting with the third instead of the seventh on top of the II chord **(figure 3-4)**. Again, as you go from II to V and V to I, the seventh comes down a half step while the third stays where it is.

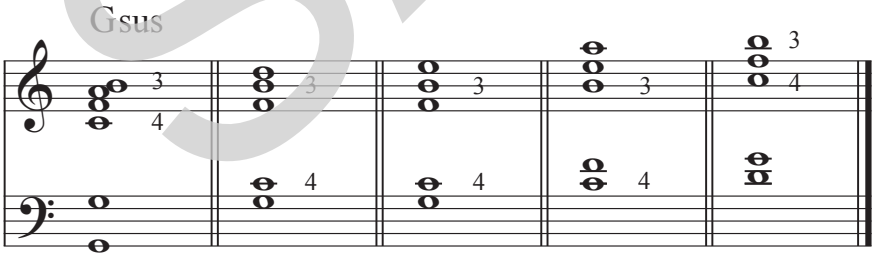
Figure 3-4



[1] Also known as the circle of fourths.

Herbie Hancock Photo ©1986 Brian McMillen

Figure 4-5

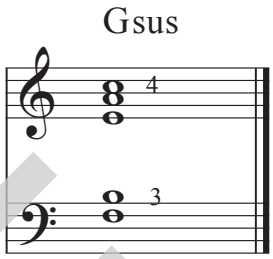


the root, D. One note in the triad has been doubled, and the fifth has been added in the left hand to strengthen the chord.

A persistent myth about sus chords is that "the fourth takes the place of the third." Jazz pianists, however, often voice the third with a sus chord, as you can see in the examples in **figure 4-5**. Note that in each example the third is voiced above the fourth. You could play the fourth above the third, as in **figure 4-6**, but the result would be a much more dissonant chord. In a tune like "Maiden Voyage," however, where each sus chord lasts for four bars,

you have more freedom to use dissonance, so the voicing in **figure 4-6** might not sound quite so harsh by the fifth or sixth chorus. Let your taste be your guide.

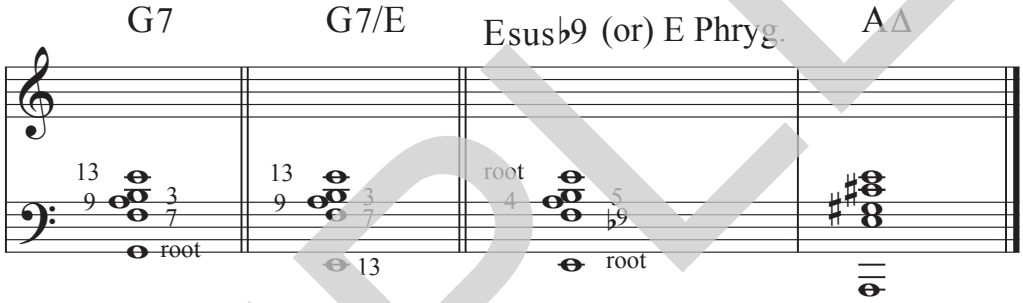
Figure 4-6



Phrygian chords

A *Phrygian* chord is a dominant seventh chord with the thirteenth instead of the root in the bass. **Figure 4-7** shows first a new G7 voicing with the root in the bass; then the same G7 voicing, but with the thirteenth, E, in the bass; and then the same chord, now analyzed as an E Phrygian chord. You might see this Phrygian chord notated with any of the three symbols shown—Esusb9, E Phryg, or G7/E—since there is no single commonly accepted chord symbol for a Phrygian chord.

Figure 4-7



As you learned in Chapter Two, Phrygian is the third mode of the major scale, so E Phrygian is derived from the third note of the C major scale. The alternate chord symbol G7/E gives a clue to what's happening here. Instead of playing G in the bass, you substitute E, the Phrygian note in the key of C. Notice how smoothly the E Phrygian chord resolves to the AΔ chord. Even though G7 is a V chord in the key of C, the V-I relationship here is between E and A.

A beautiful example of Phrygian harmony is the Eb Phrygian chord that McCoy Tyner plays on the intro to John Coltrane's "After The Rain."[3] Another example is the Eb Phrygian chord in bars four, twelve, and twenty-eight in Wayne Shorter's haunting slow waltz "Penelope."[4] And yet another example is the A Phrygian chord in the fourth bar of Duke Ellington's "Melancholia."[5]

[3] John Coltrane, *Impressions*, MCA/Impulse MCA-5887.
[4] Wayne Shorter, *Etcetera*, Blue Note LT-I056, Herbie Hancock on piano.
[5] Duke Ellington, *Piano Reflections*, Capitol II058.

Figure 5-8