Stride Piano

By
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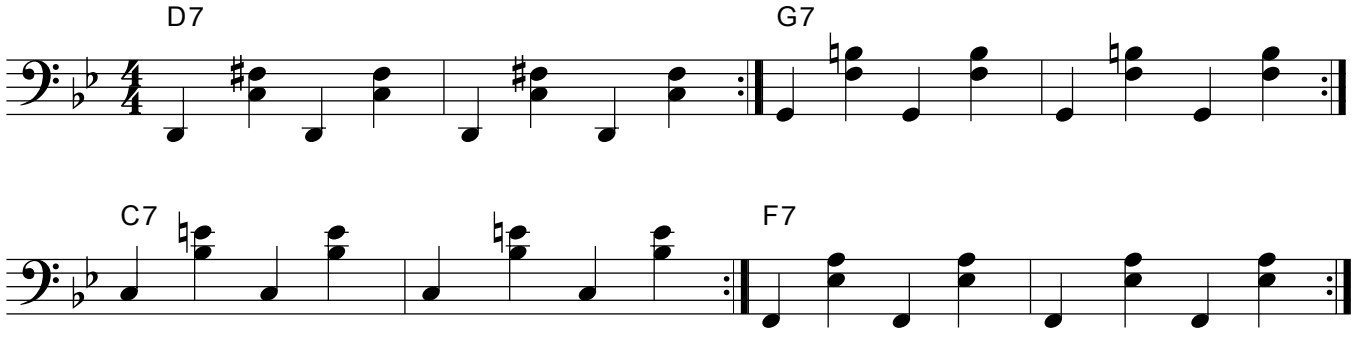
Last week I had the pleasure of working with the Orlando Philharmonic in their “History of Jazz” production. The interesting instrumentation featured the Group Sovereign Brass which is a part of the Orlando Philharmonic. Since the main instrumentation consisted of 2 trumpets, trombone, french horn, tuba, tenor sax, percussion and piano, all the arrangements had to be custom written.

One of the featured segments of the concert was the history of jazz piano, which sent me to the practice room for several days. I played a medley of songs in which I featured the styles of Jelly Roll Morton, Art Tatum, Bud Powell Bill Evans and Chick Corea. This gave me a great opportunity to practice the stride style which is something I don’t use on a regular basis. After spending time listening to Jelly Roll Morton, James P. Johnson and Art Tatum you really develop respect for these master musicians. I also found out that it is a great way to tighten up your playing and improve your time.

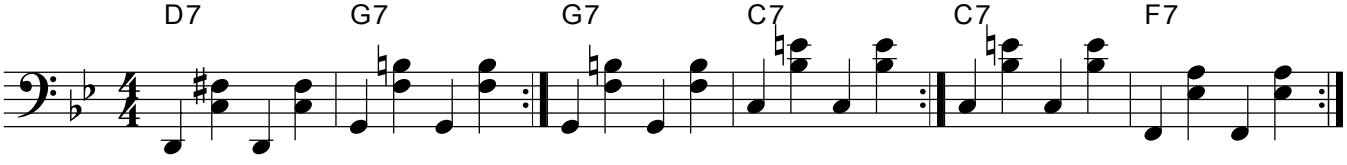
The examples below are exercises which will help you practice this style of music. I also recommend that you get your old ragtime piano books out and practice these pieces the way you would practice a classical piece.

Left Hand

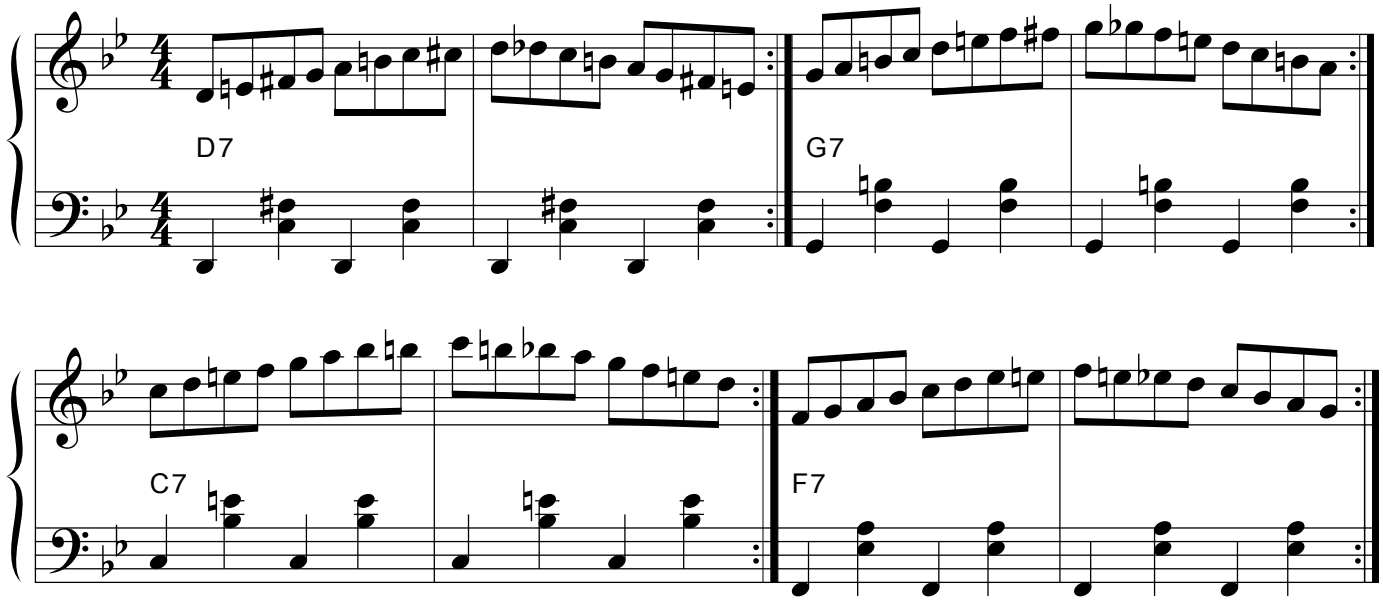
In order to play stride piano you have to spend time practicing the left hand. Be careful to not overdue this because it is physically demanding on your hand and arm. Practice the first example slowly and controlled until you are absolutely sure of the notes. Look at it as a mechanical exercise for now. Keep in mind that after you get the feel for the distance between the bass note and the chord, you will have it down forever. **The distance will never change**.



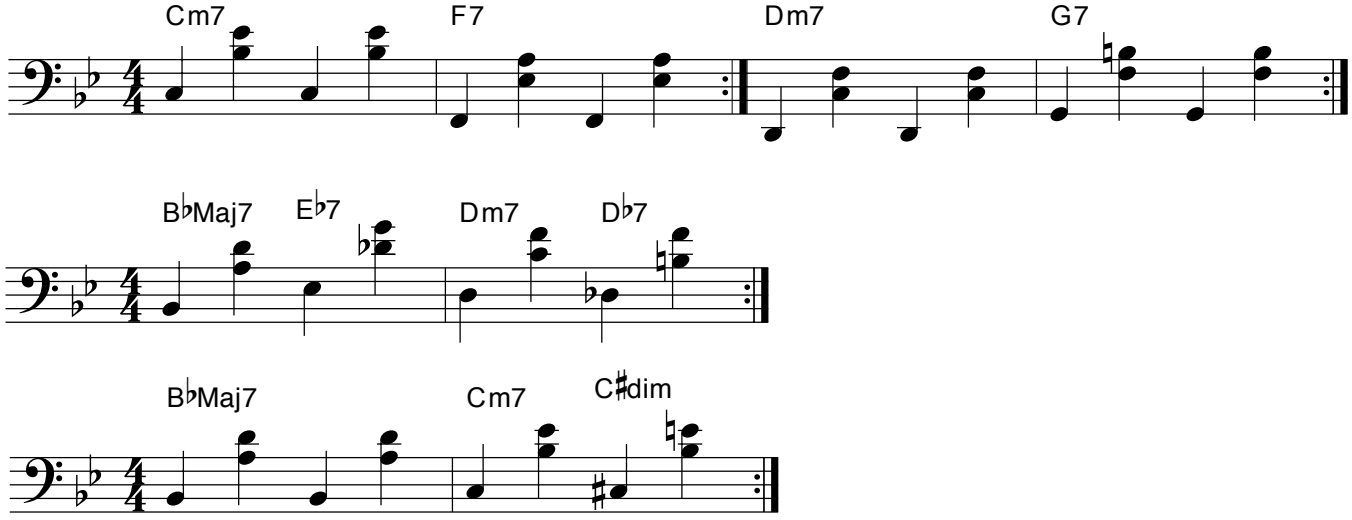
The next exercise will help you with going from chord to chord. Just as you did with the last example, stay on the first two bar pattern until you are sure about the distances and you have it imprinted in your head.



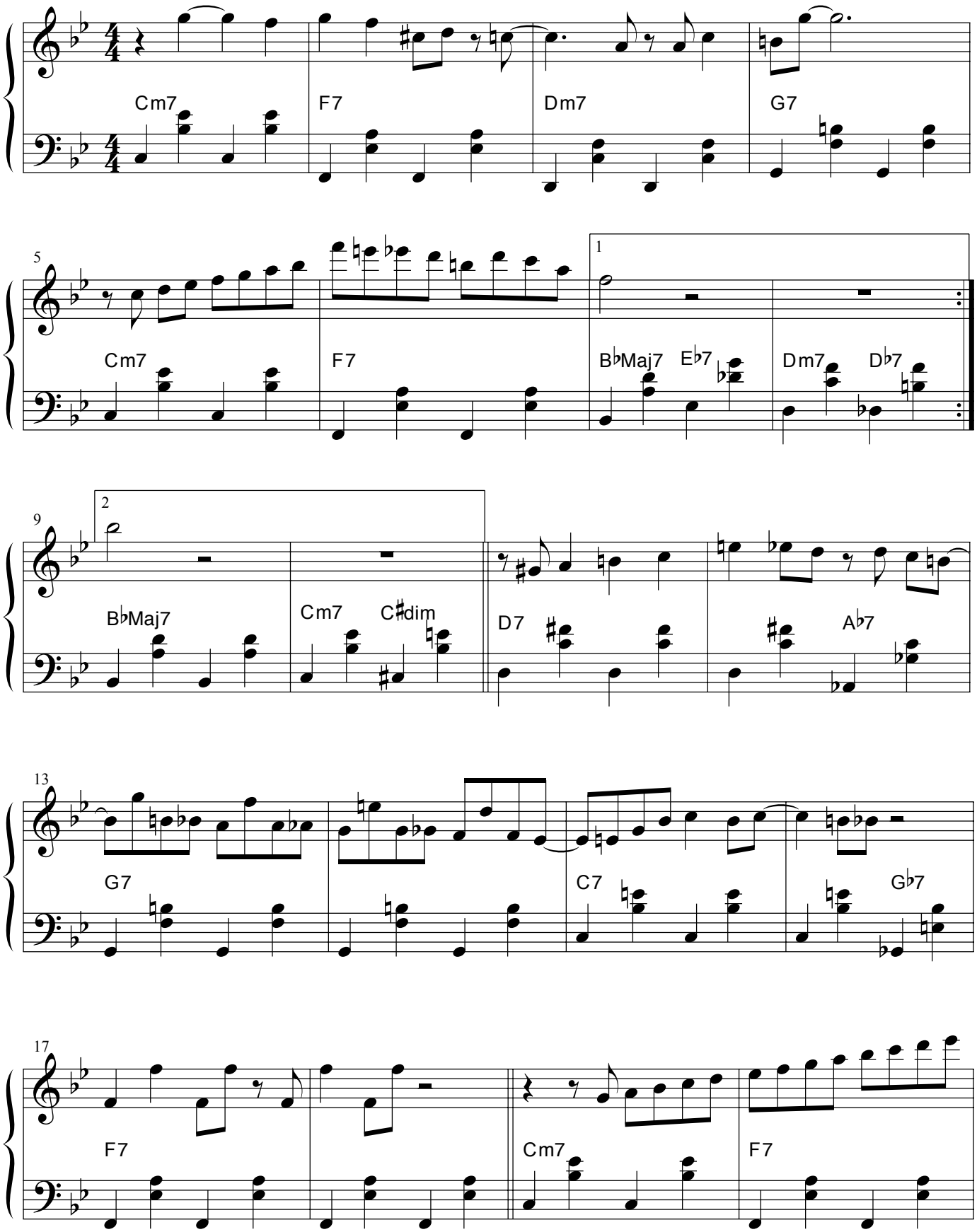
When you add notes in the right hand you will find out how good or bad your time is. Practice the left hand with the metronome and then add the right. It is important that the time is exact in both hands to make it sound smooth and controlled. Most likely you will have a tendency to rush the eighth notes in the right hand, so stay focused on the tempo.

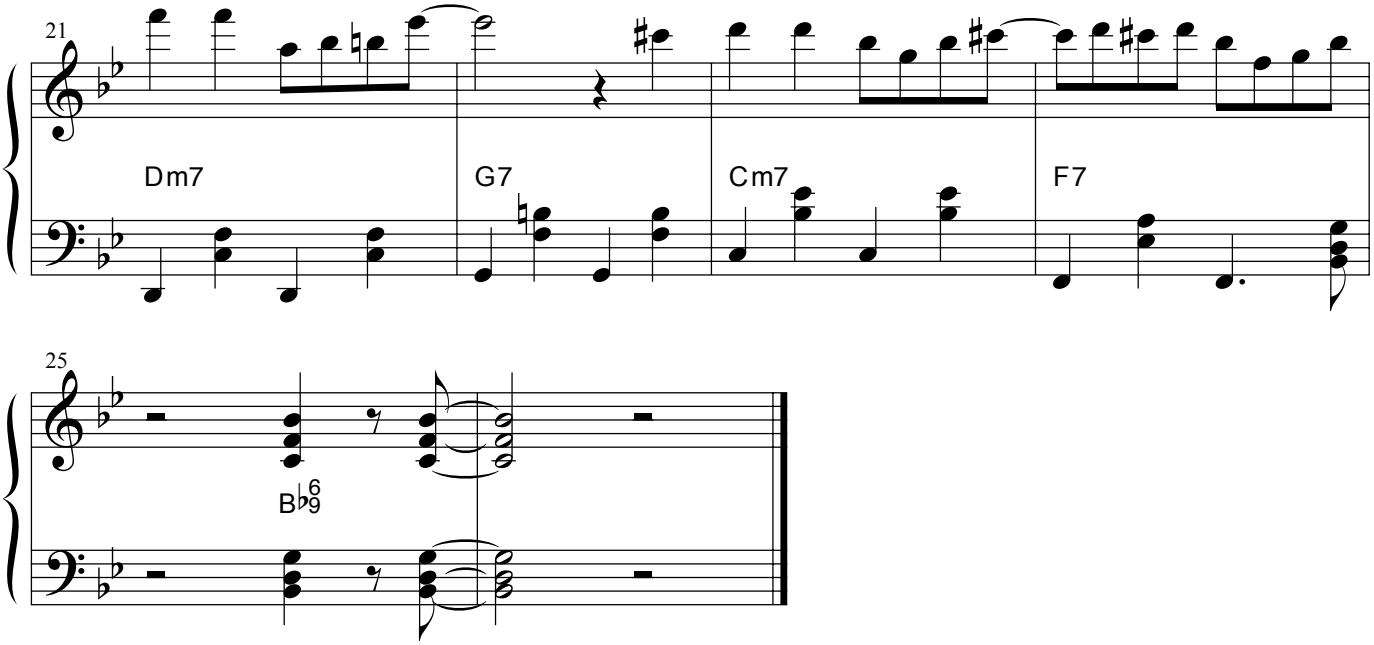


The following examples are segments from the etude on page 3 and 4. When approaching a tune in this style, it is good to break it down into smaller segments and practice the left hand first. The left hand should be on auto pilot.



The ultimate goal is to be able to improvise over a given set of chord changes in the stride style. Therefore, use this etude as a guide and take away, add or change the right hand as much as you want. Also try to incorporate this practice routine with other tunes.


Cm7
F7
Dm7
G7
5
Cm7
F7
1
B♭Maj7
E♭7
Dm7
D♭7
9
2
B♭Maj7
Cm7
C♯dim
D7
A♭7
13
G7
C7
G♭7
17
F7
Cm7
F7


21
Dm7
G7
Cm7
F7

25
B♭6/9