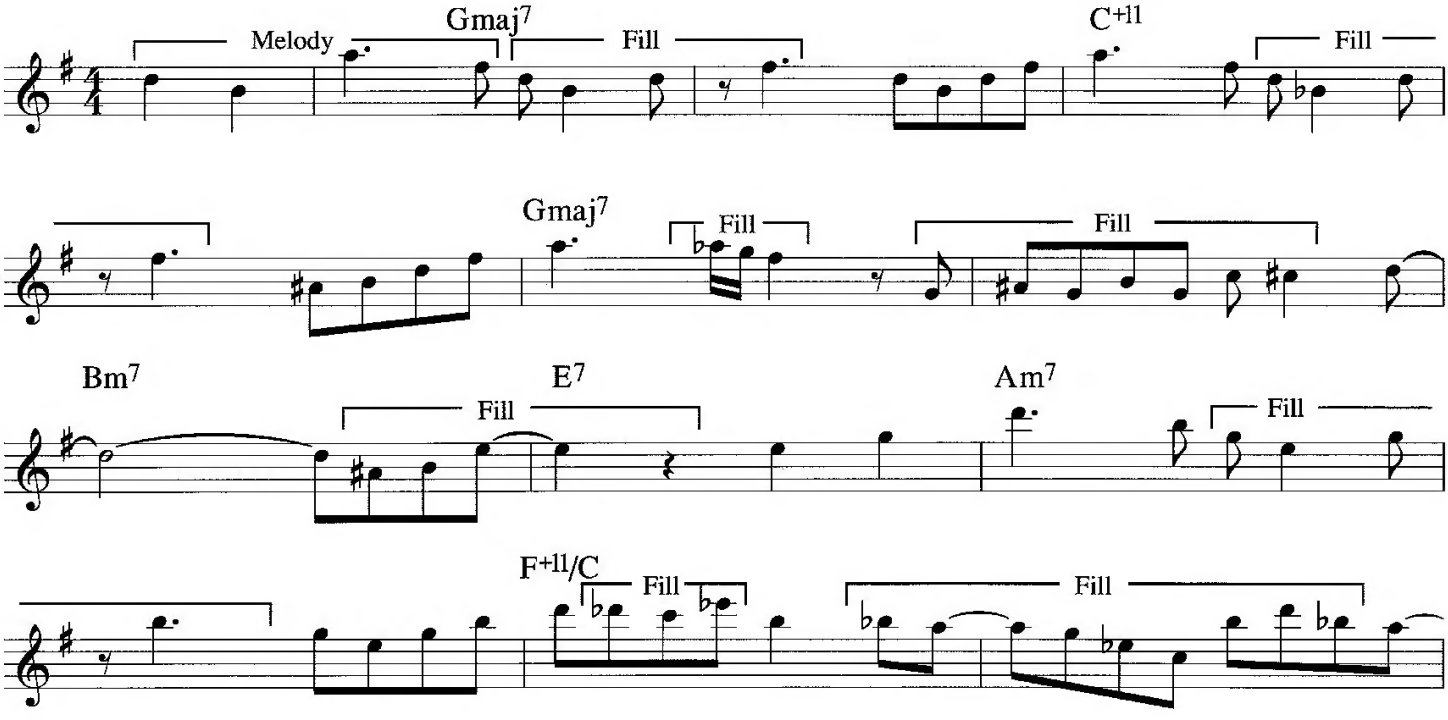
132. "How can I use the melody to the tune I'm playing in developing a solo? The reason I want to do this is to give the solo on each tune a distinctive stamp, to give it the mark of that tune. It's all too easy to just play the melody and then go to the same old stuff I play on every tune.In this way, they all run together, and over the course of a night I end up playing a four-hour tune interrupted by various melodies. There's nothing unique to each song."

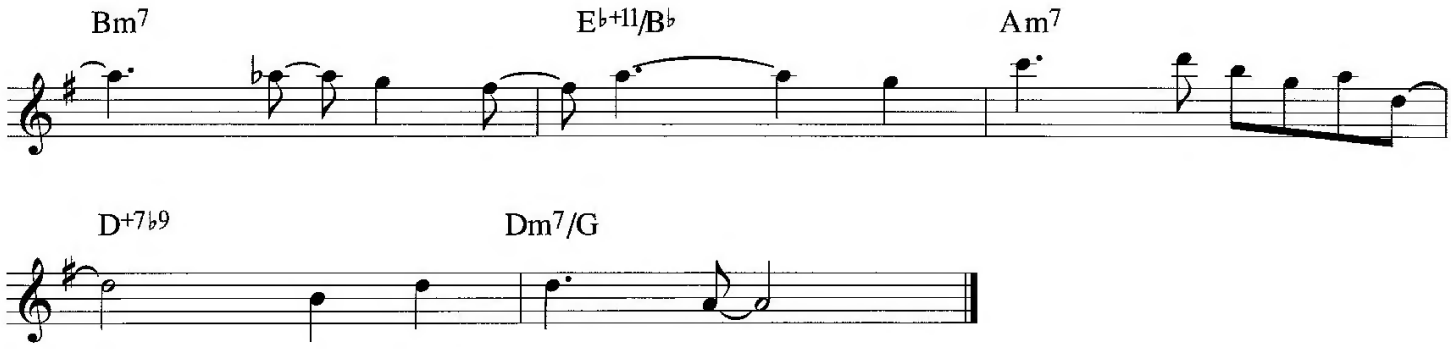
Diagnosis:

The problem is all too obvious - the melody is totally lost as soon as the solo begins. Some way needs to be found to preserve the melody so that the listener recognizes, at least in part, what is heard. (One may say that one knows what one likes, however, along with Stravinsky, we might think it closer to the truth to say that one likes what one knows.)

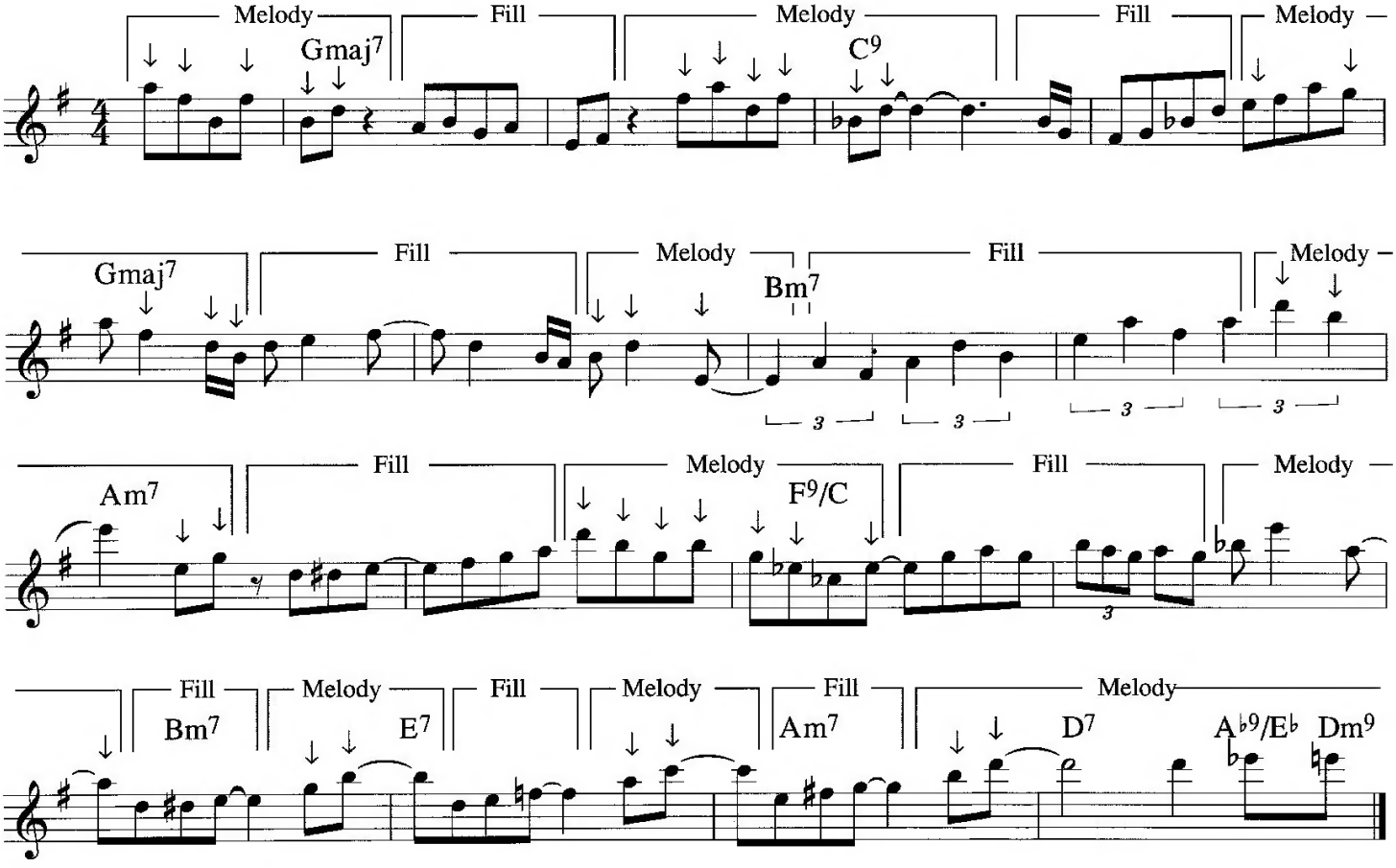
Remedy:

(1) Play the entire melody, keeping it wholly intact, but insert fills in the open spaces where the melody isn't moving. This is illustrated in the following:

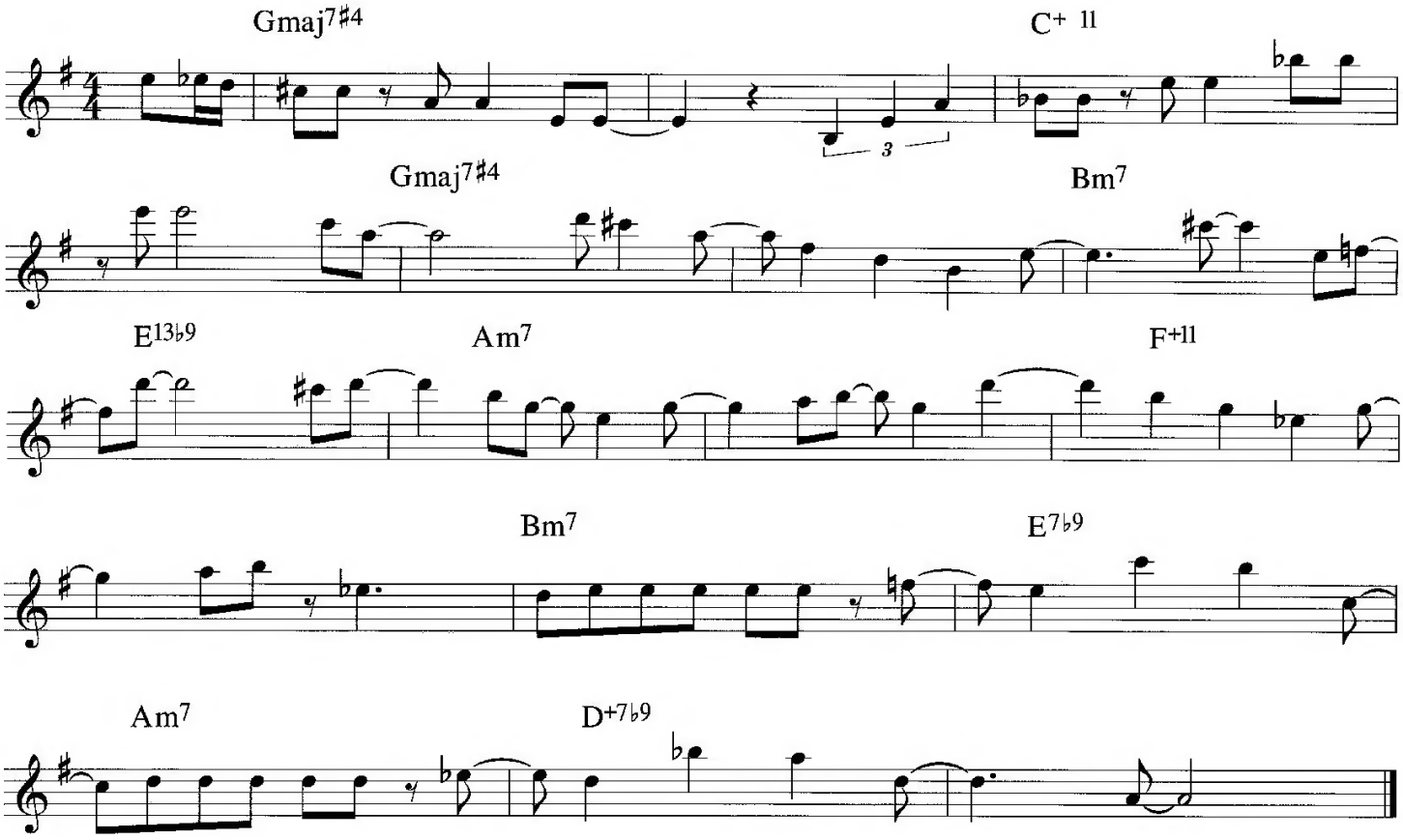




(2) Preserve the melody in terms of the melodic contour, but shorten the duration of the held tone so that much more fill space is available. For example, if the melody in (1) rested on a whole note, abbreviate that to an eighth note and fill through the remaining space. But keep in mind: the general melodic shape is preserved so that if lines were drawn connecting the notes, the contour would be the same as the original melody (here designated by arrows).



(3) The next step leads to the total erosion of the melody. The fill areas remain as fill areas and melody areas are now replaced by fills also. The melody of the tune is gone, and the improviser is left free to move with no melodic constraints. This point was just a point where the ailment started, but now this point has been arrived at logically, and the listener has been taken along, step by step.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3
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Bm7
E13b9
Am7
F+11
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