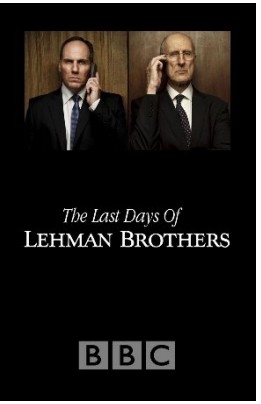
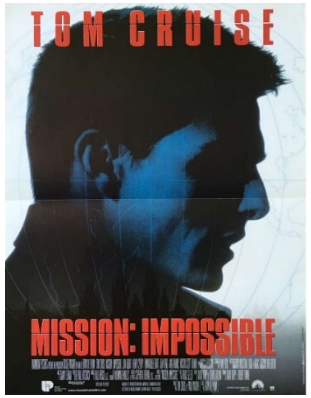
BM

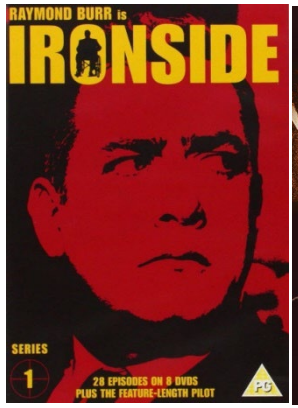
Dissonance & Abstraction @ the Movies

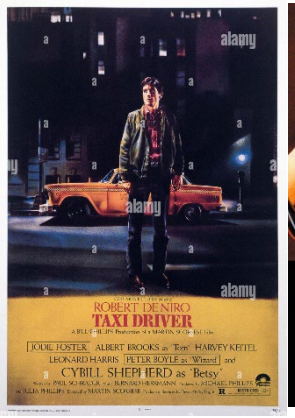
Dissonance & Abstraction @ the Movies

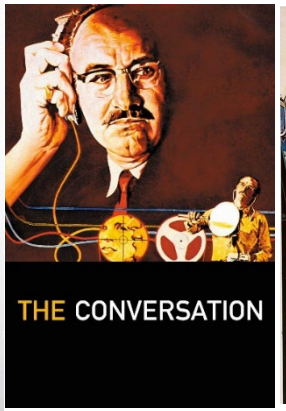
through the lens of 60's/70's progressive jazz

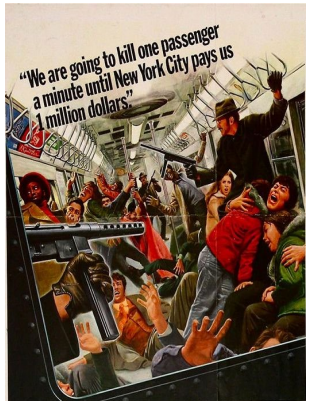


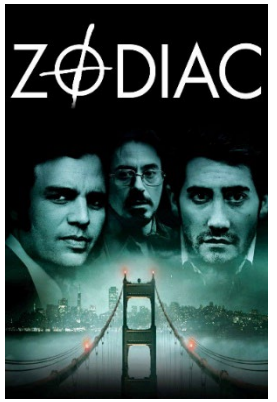


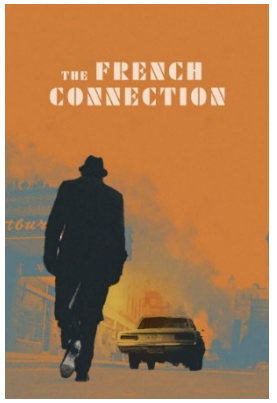




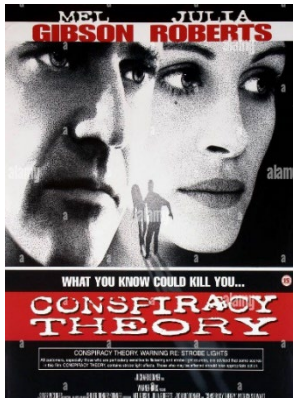


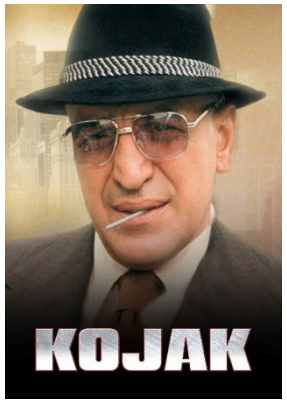


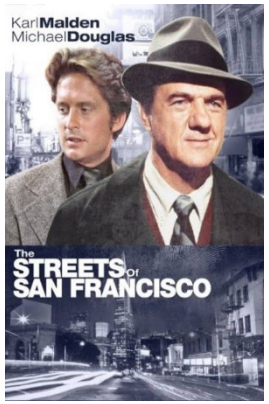


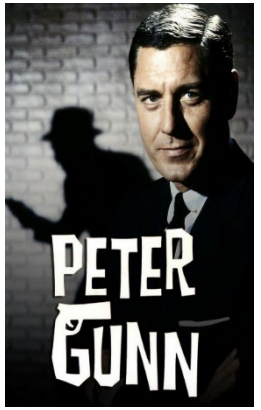


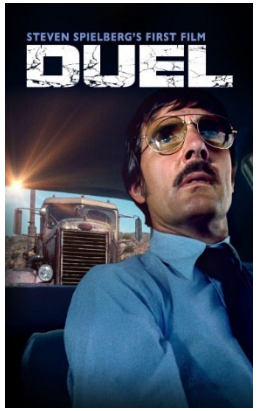
through the lens of 60's/70's progressive jazz











The musical prism through which we **remember**

Although the vast majority of listeners do not recognise music **literally** and are not able to **literally** identify the notes and chords, for many people it is the music they remember sometimes more than the film or TV show

Something people understand in a largely **emotional** way often eclipses more literal or visual memories - supposedly superior methods of understanding

Traditional memory v Emotional memory

You can prove this yourself by asking someone to name the **actors or characters** from a television show from twenty years ago. Many will not be able to. But if you play the **theme music,** many will recognise it and name the show. It is strange that something that communicates via the vagaries of **emotional memory** can sometimes be more effective than our actual visual memory of people, places, events, etc.

Eric Deggans discusses the ‘death of the TV song’ in the Chicago Tribune:

“I write today about the passing of something special, fading away so subtly many of us have failed to take proper notice. The death of the TV theme tune, from ‘Mission: Impossible’ (did a trilling string tremolo ever sound cooler?) to the theme from ‘Ironside’. “So, why do so few current TV shows have memorable themes? My hunch is that modern TV producers fear flip-happy viewers will take any excuse to surf away from a show and sample other channels. Eliminating the theme tune is just another way to deal with the multitude of channels and remote-control technology offered today's consumers, locking them into an unfolding show before they even realize it has begun.”

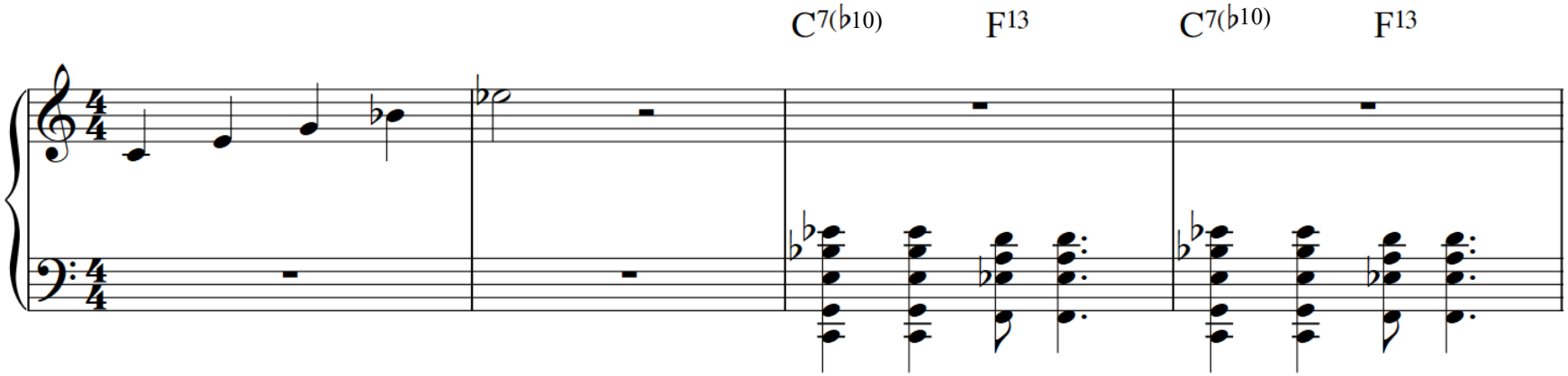
The ‘death of the TV theme’ Chicago Tribune 2nd Jan 2008

Chicago Tribune

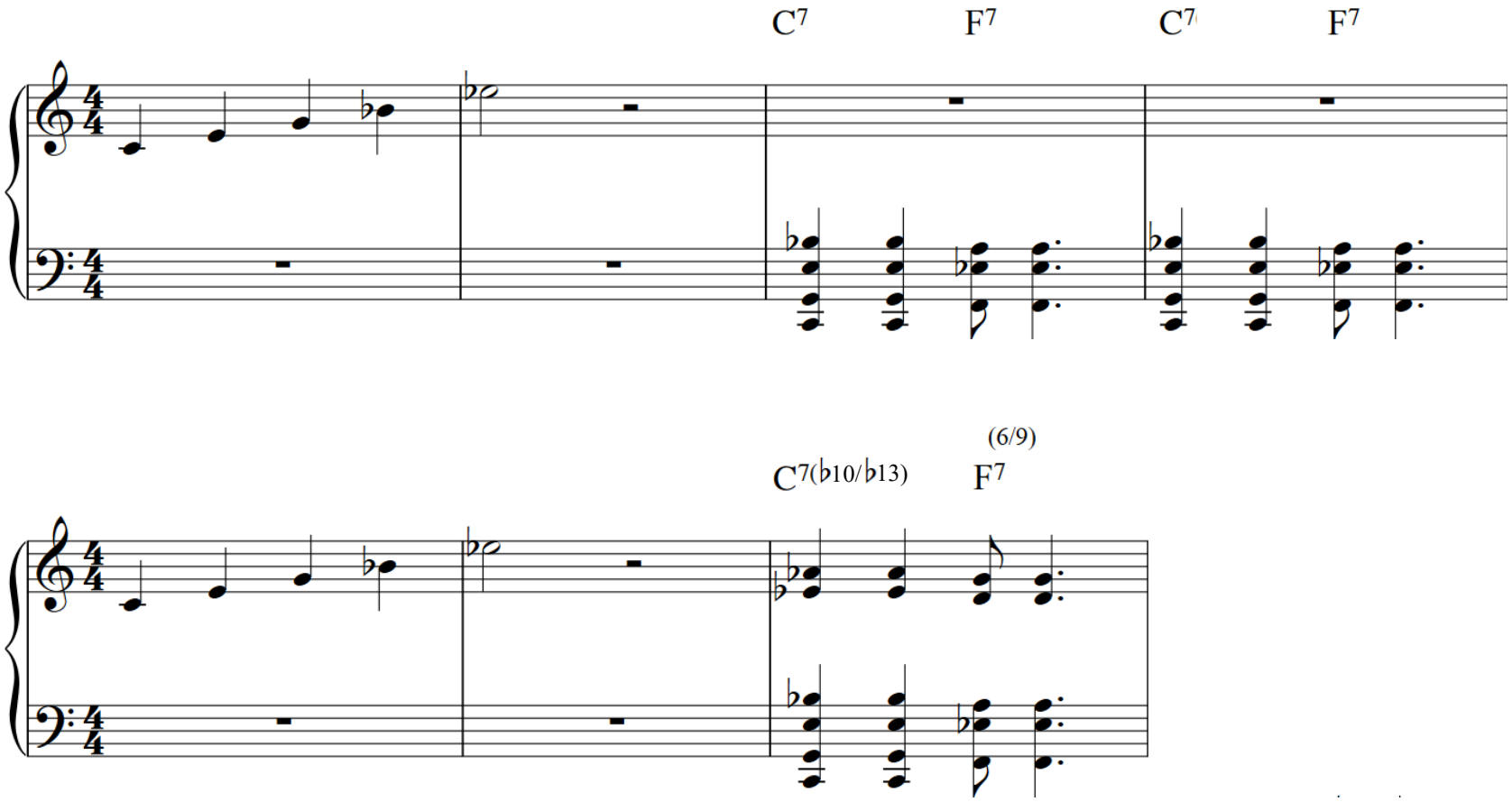
Dirty jazz chords

‘Play School’

The humble ‘flat 10’



Variations



The Last Days Of
LEHMAN BROTHERS

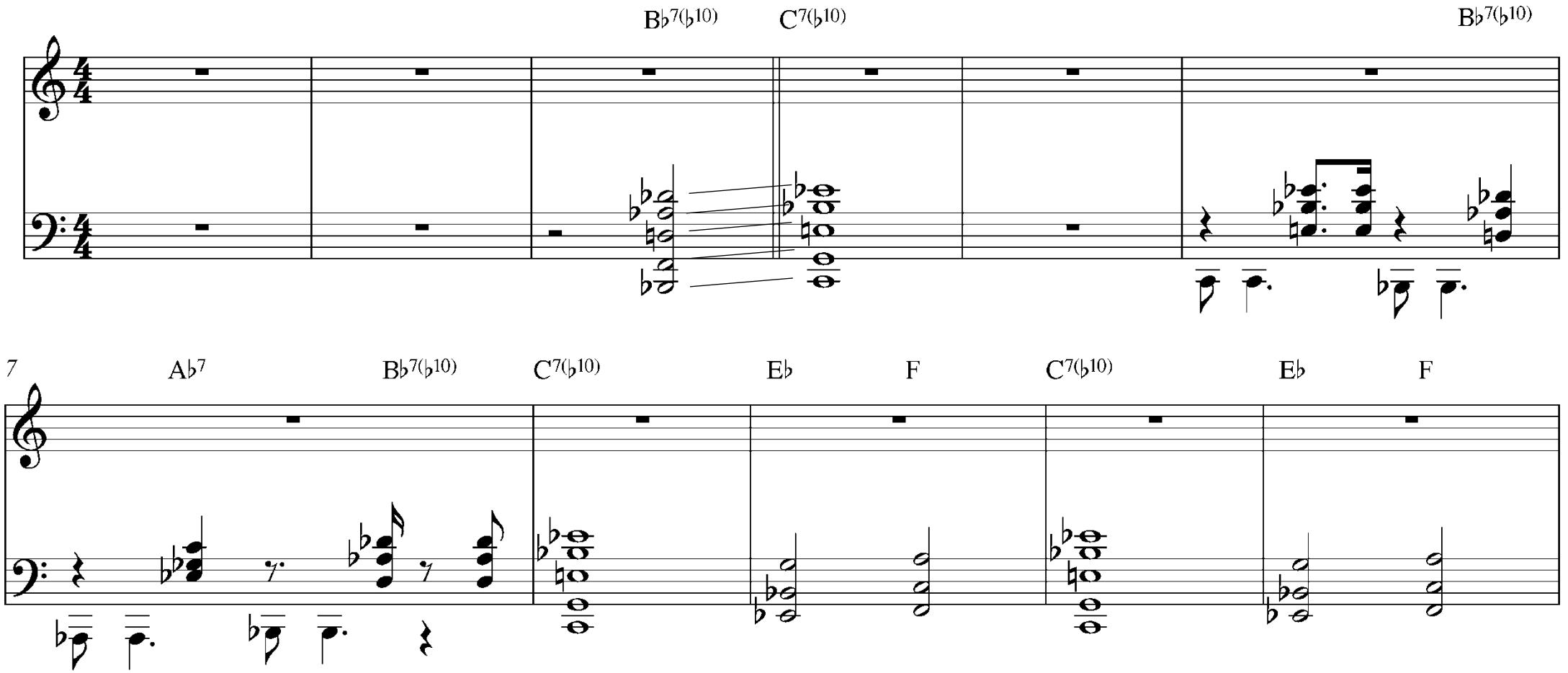
MUSIC BY KEVIN SARGENT

BBC

KEVIN SARGENT

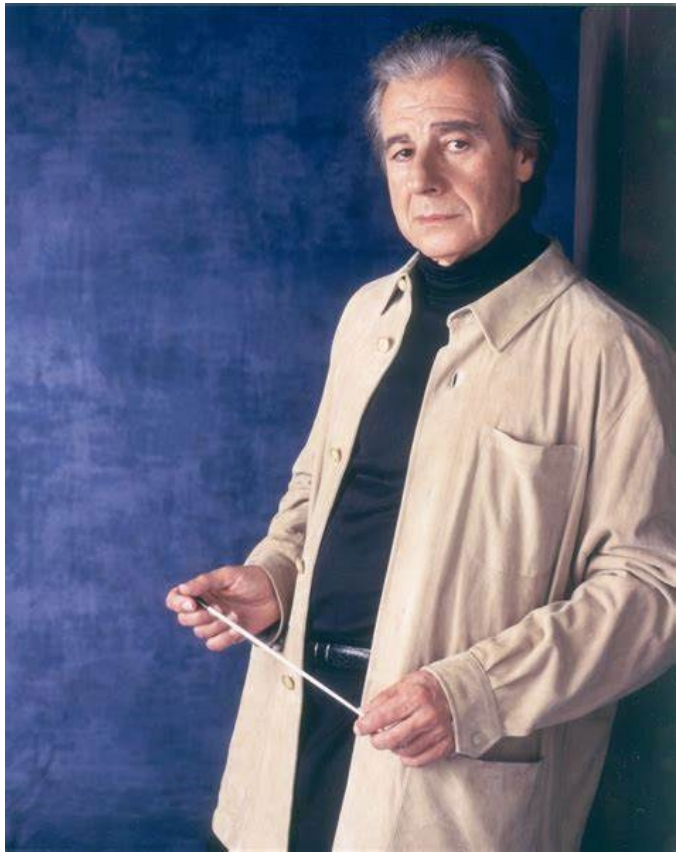
00.00.37

Piano / Strings



“Music lives or dies by its arrangement.”

Lalo Schifrin, like most great composers, above all else, is a consummate arranger, who understands structure and placement like few others. Music is a living, evolving thing and every style normally has an atypical approach to arrangement, which acts kind of as the ‘**textural ‘clothes’** that the harmony wears.

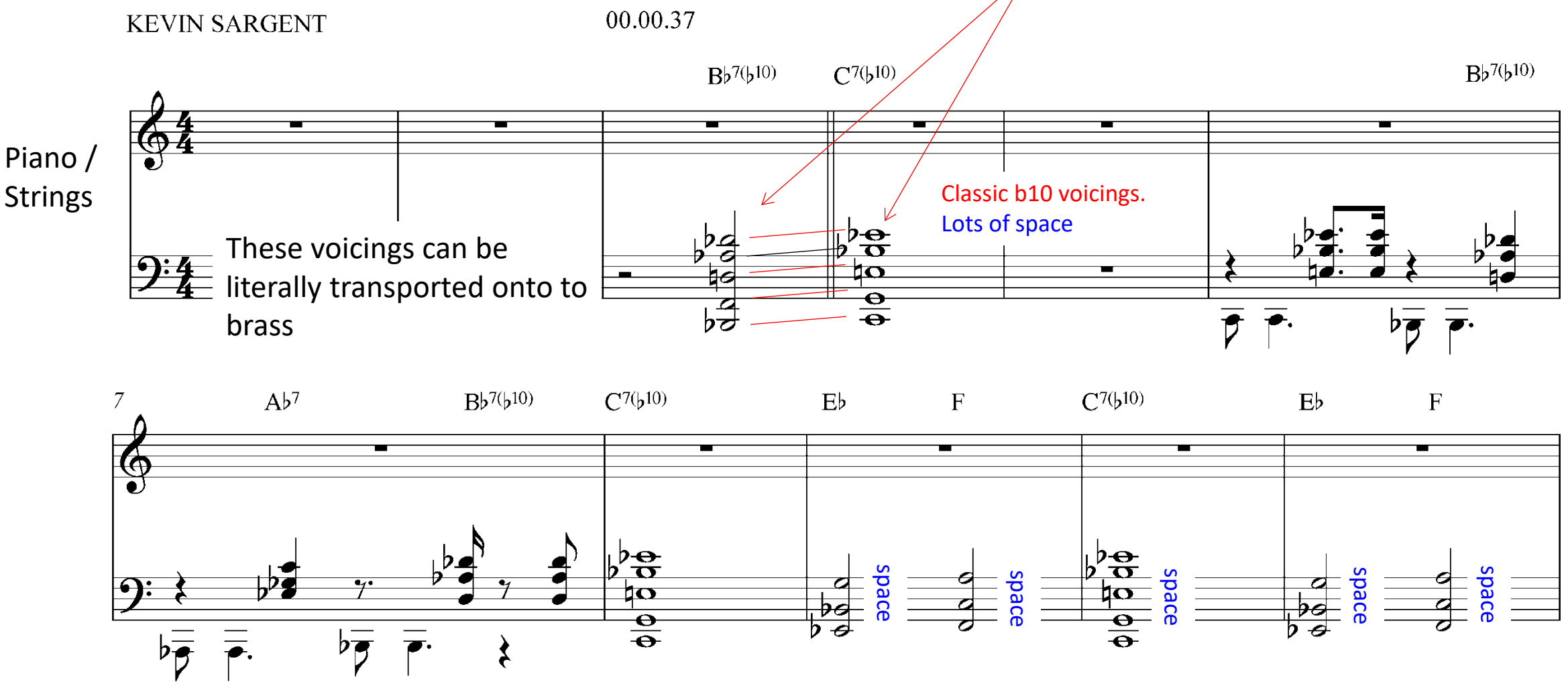


“Don’t hide behind your music.”

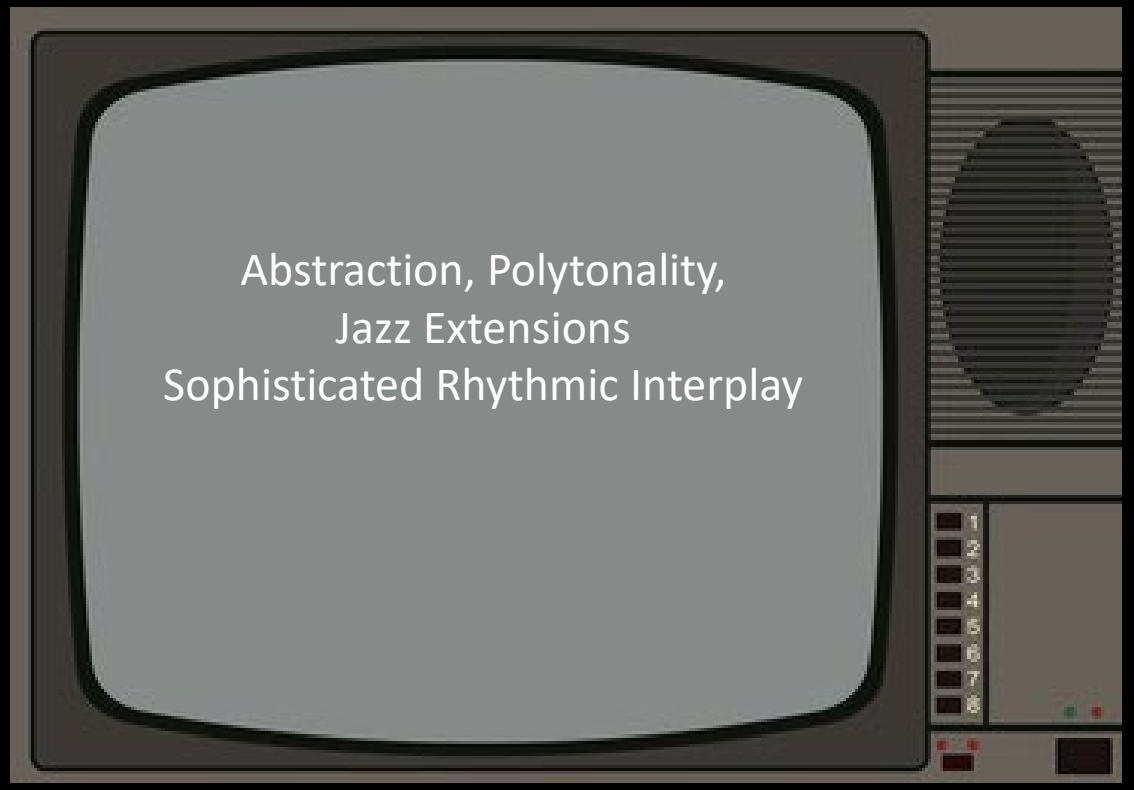
Don’t be afraid to expose important bits of your music. Don’t be afraid to do minimal. Don’t be afraid of space. Don’t be afraid of silence. Don’t fill every available space.

Jazz harmonies and loose instrumentation is used to characterise the financial crisis of 2008

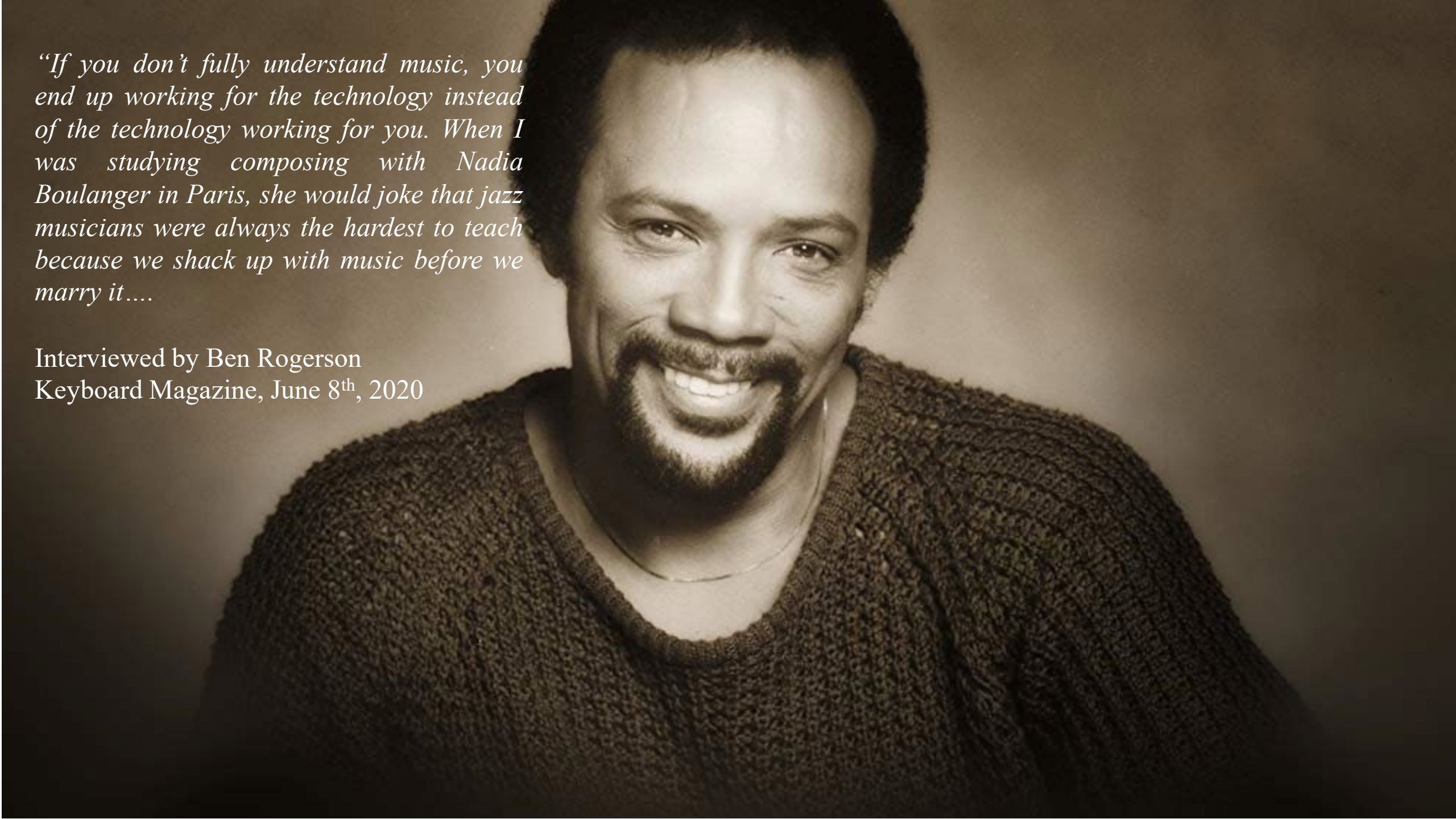
Lots of vertical space makes the notes that **are** there, resonate



A harmonic flavour becomes an indelible musical calling card for this film

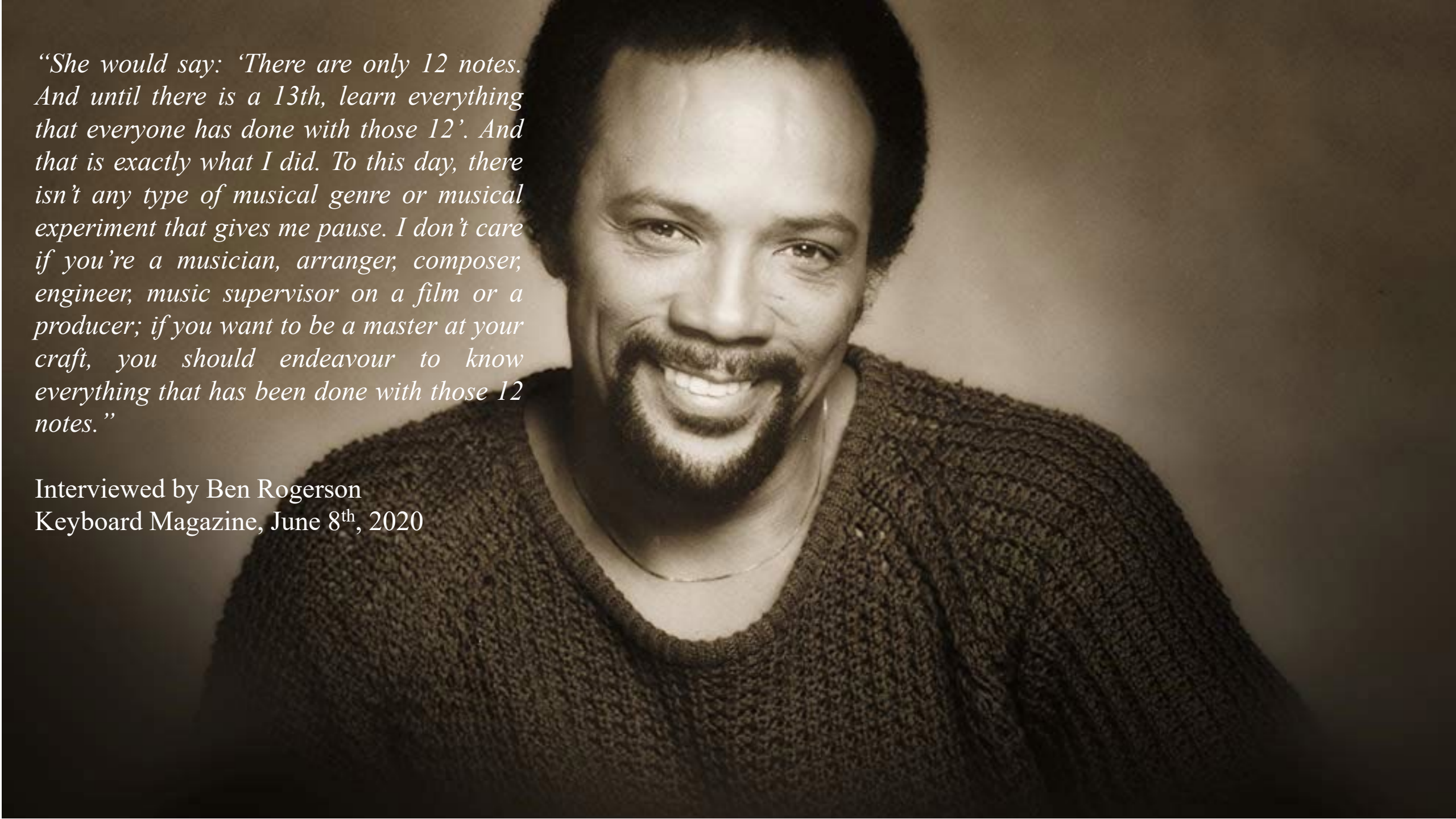

Abstraction, Polytonality,
Jazz Extensions
Sophisticated Rhythmic Interplay

IRONSIDE



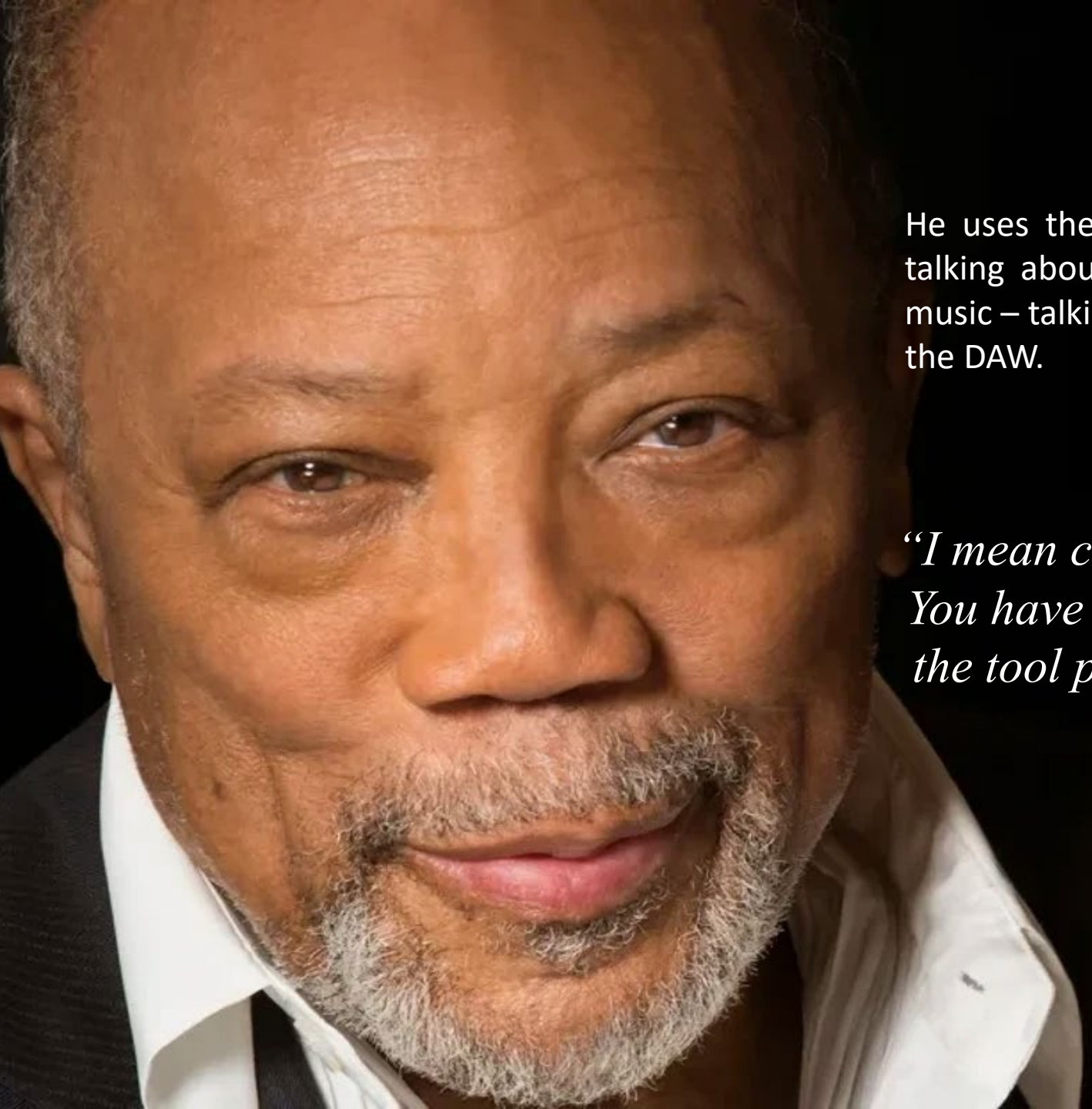
"If you don't fully understand music, you end up working for the technology instead of the technology working for you. When I was studying composing with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, she would joke that jazz musicians were always the hardest to teach because we shack up with music before we marry it….

Interviewed by Ben Rogerson
Keyboard Magazine, June 8th, 2020



"She would say: 'There are only 12 notes. And until there is a 13th, learn everything that everyone has done with those 12'. And that is exactly what I did. To this day, there isn't any type of musical genre or musical experiment that gives me pause. I don't care if you're a musician, arranger, composer, engineer, music supervisor on a film or a producer; if you want to be a master at your craft, you should endeavour to know everything that has been done with those 12 notes."

Interviewed by Ben Rogerson
Keyboard Magazine, June 8th, 2020

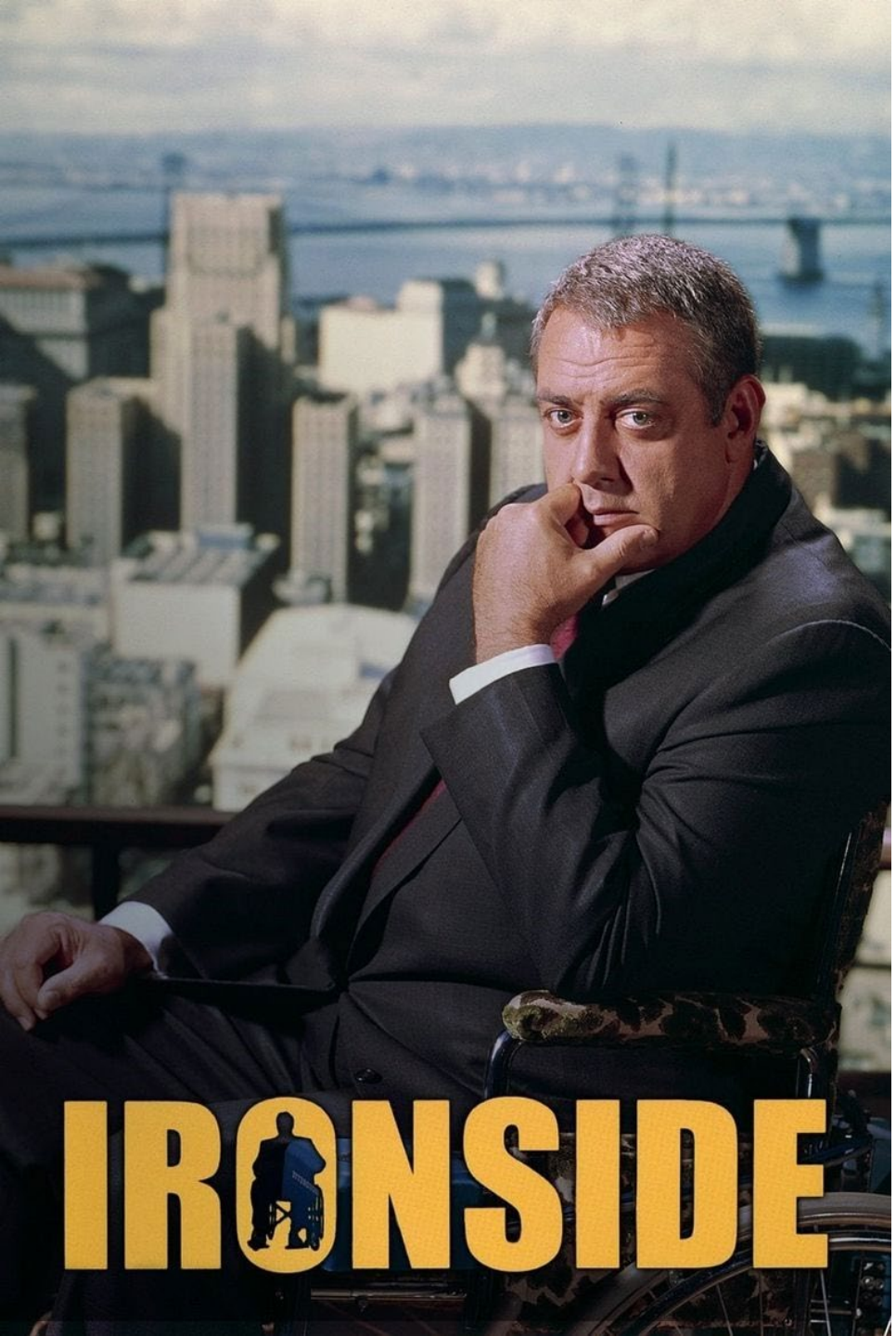


He uses the same argument in the same interview when he is talking about the overreliance on technology in the creation of music – talking about the 'cut and paste' mentality of composing in the DAW.

"I mean come on, man. The technology is a tool. You have to know what you're building to utilise the tool properly."

Quincy Jones

Interviewed by Ben Rogerson
Keyboard Magazine, June 8th, 2020



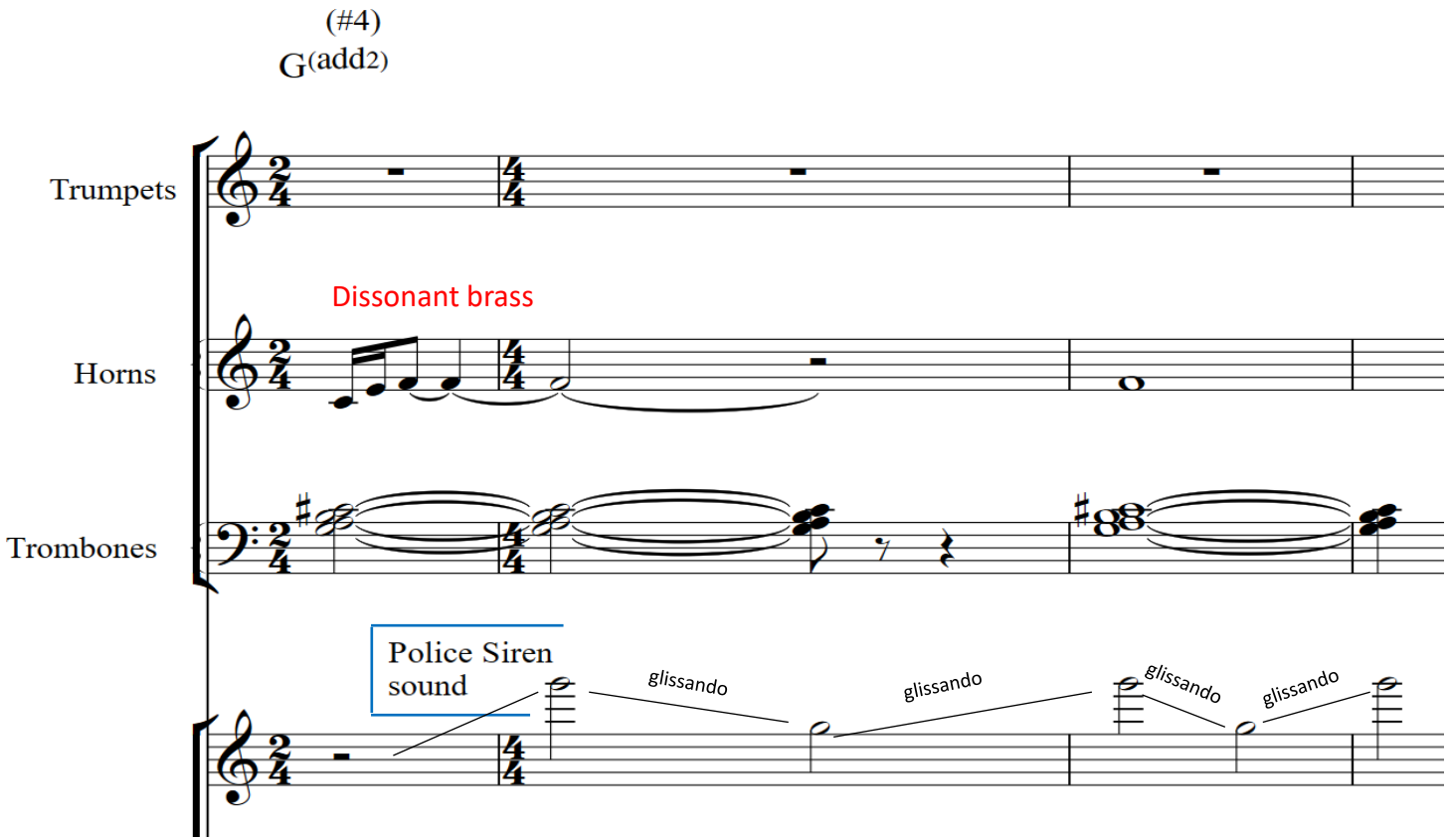
In a BBC article called “12 musicians you didn’t know had written famous TV themes’ Jeremy Allen says:

> *“The funky, borderline psychedelic theme from the very unpsychedelic TV series Ironside, about a wheelchair-using detective played by Raymond Burr, was written and performed by Quincy Jones. The irrepressible American soul and jazz legend’s achievements include being the producer and co-writer of the best-selling album of all time – Michael Jackson’s Thriller. The Ironside theme appeared on the 1971 album Smackwater Jack and parts of it have been sampled over a hundred times by artists including Drake and Dr Dre.”*

Jeremy Allen August 23rd 2018

As Jeremy Allen says, the piece does have a psychedelic tinge to it, which is probably down to the ‘police siren’ synth sound, the Fender Rhodes sound and the heavy and occasionally dissonant use of brass.

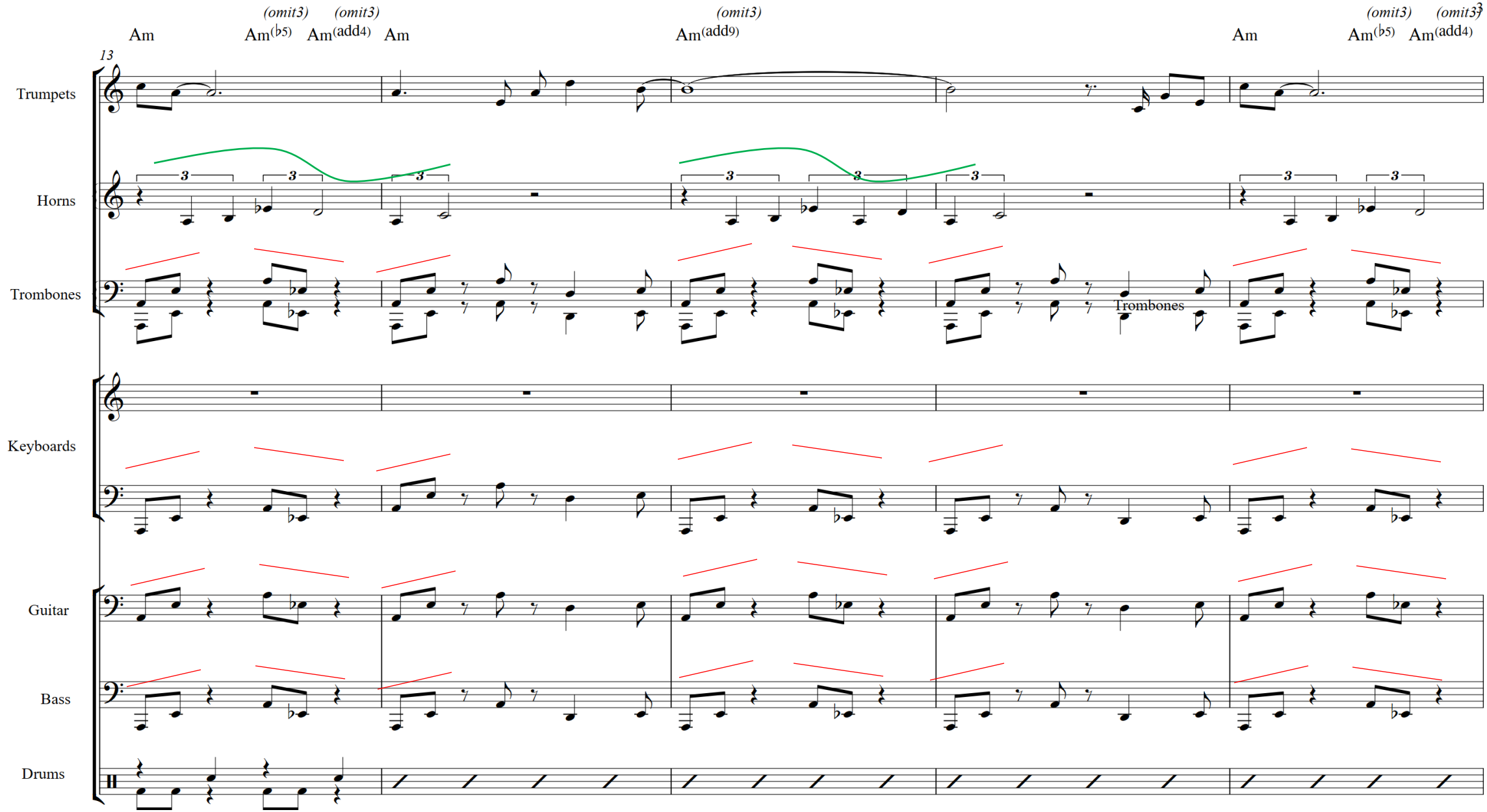
These are also amongst the characteristics that make it ideal for a dramatic cop show. At the time this kind of textural approach gave the piece a contemporary and almost experimental feel.



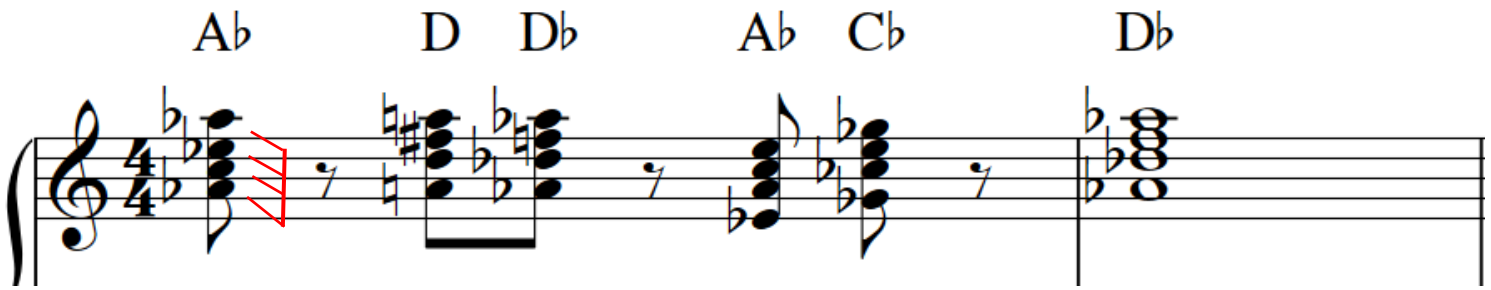
Rhythmic interplay

Two distinct and different rhythmic patterns occupying the same space

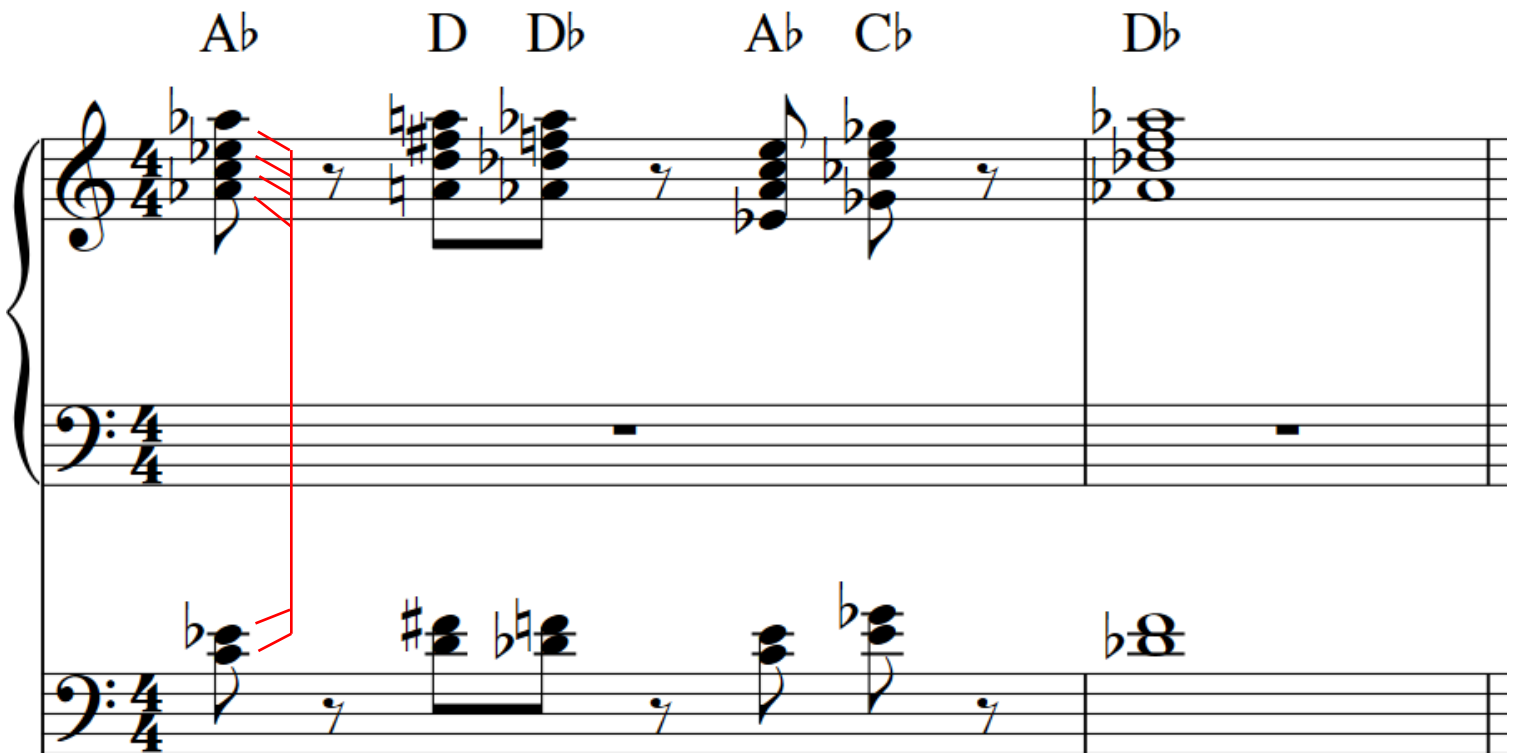
Rhythmic interplay 00.19



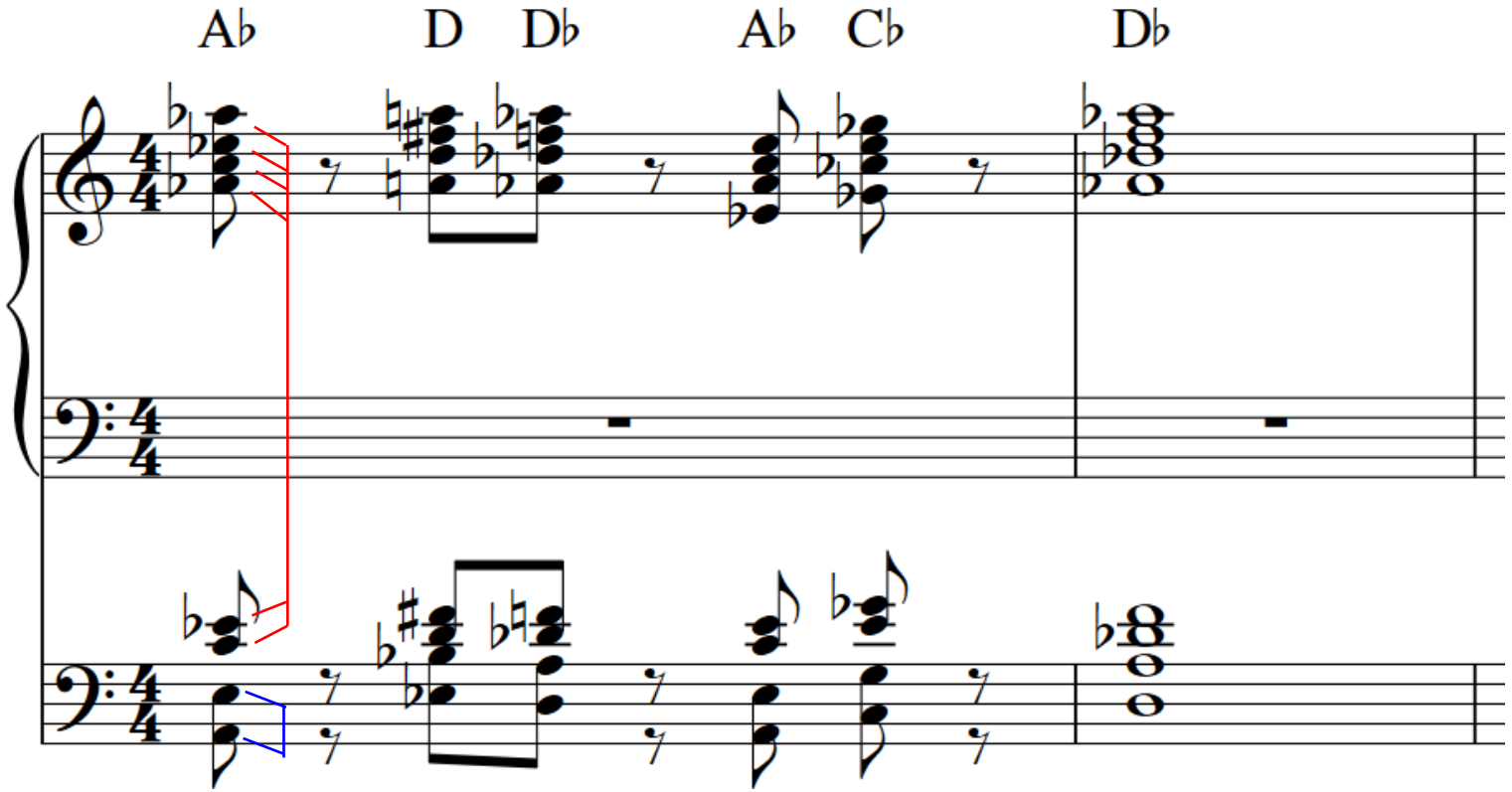
The final two bars have an almost legendary status amongst Jazz musicians and arrangers. In this example (bars 21-22) we find the trumpet playing chords of **Ab, D, Db, Ab, Cb, Db**, but on listening to it we can tell something is ‘off’, i.e. something has been deliberately skewed. As in other examples we’ve looked at, this is not chaos. It is not random dissonance. There is a plan.



If we look at the trombones, we will see the top two notes (Eb and C) conform to the trumpet chords

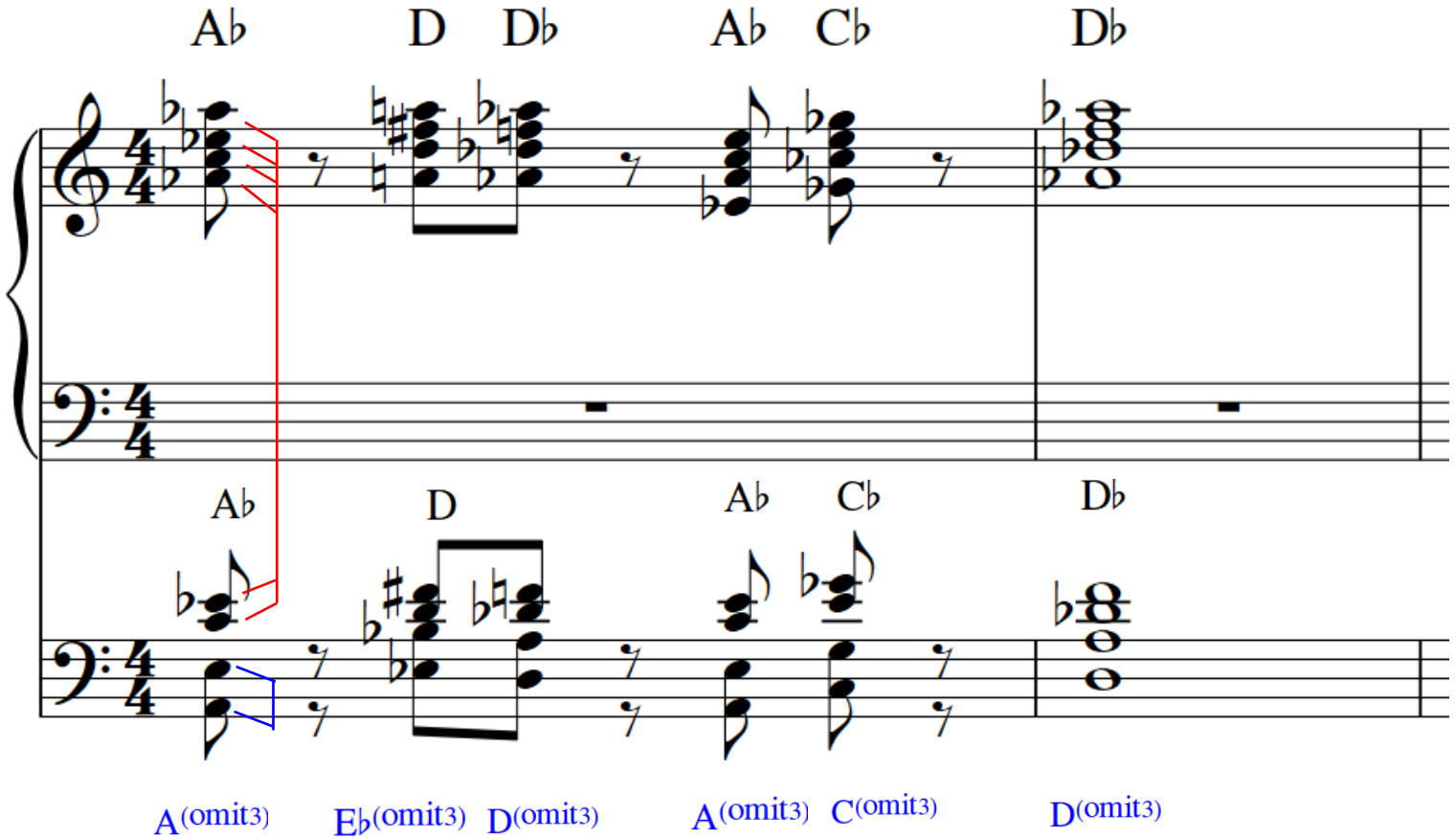


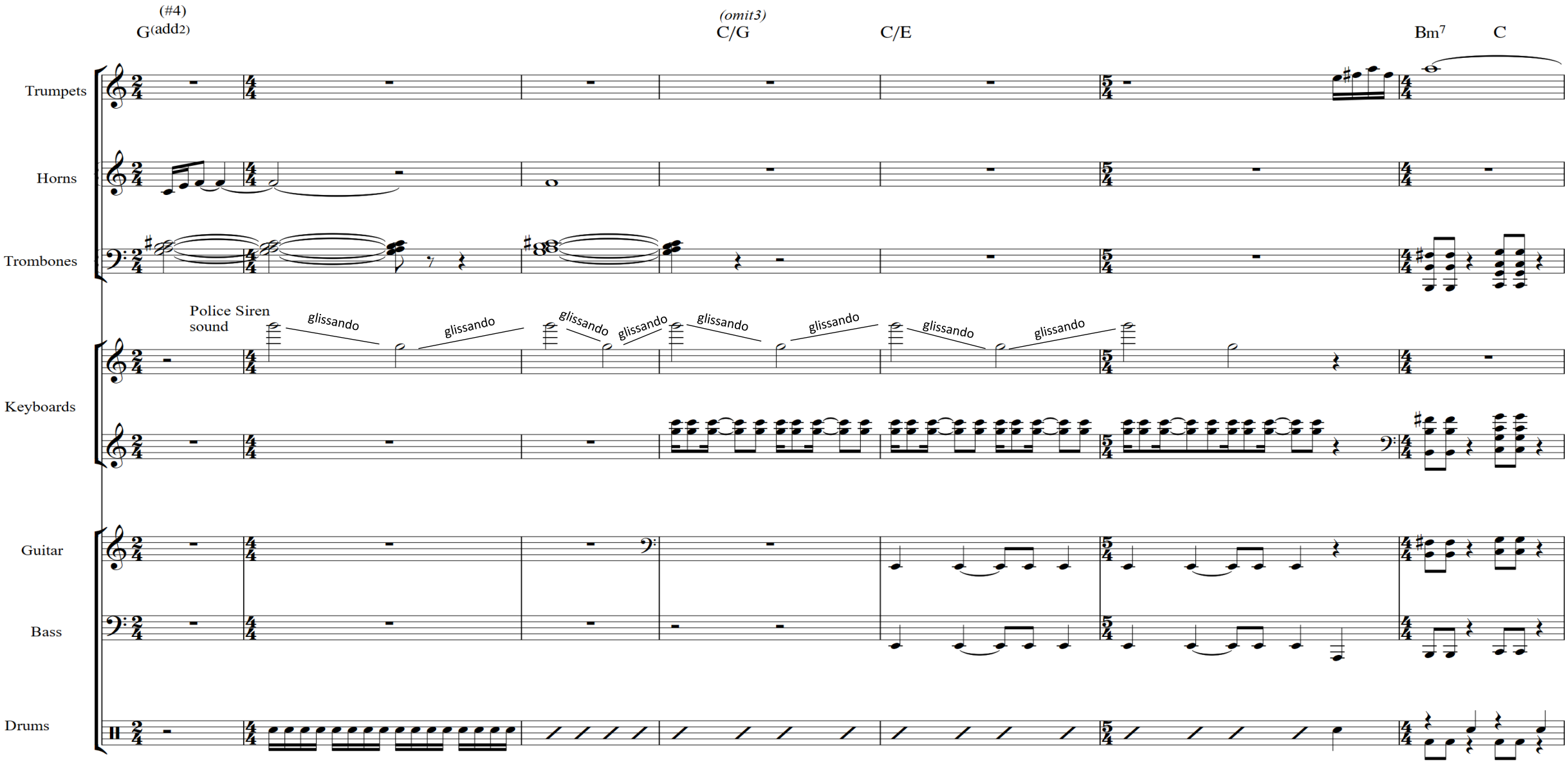
If we look at the trombones, we will see the top two notes (Eb and C) conform to the trumpet chords, but the bottom two notes **(A and E)** are a semitone up from what *would* have been there if the chord was an Ab; **the trombones are playing as if the chord is an A.** The bottom two trombones maintain this going through all six chords of the final two bars.

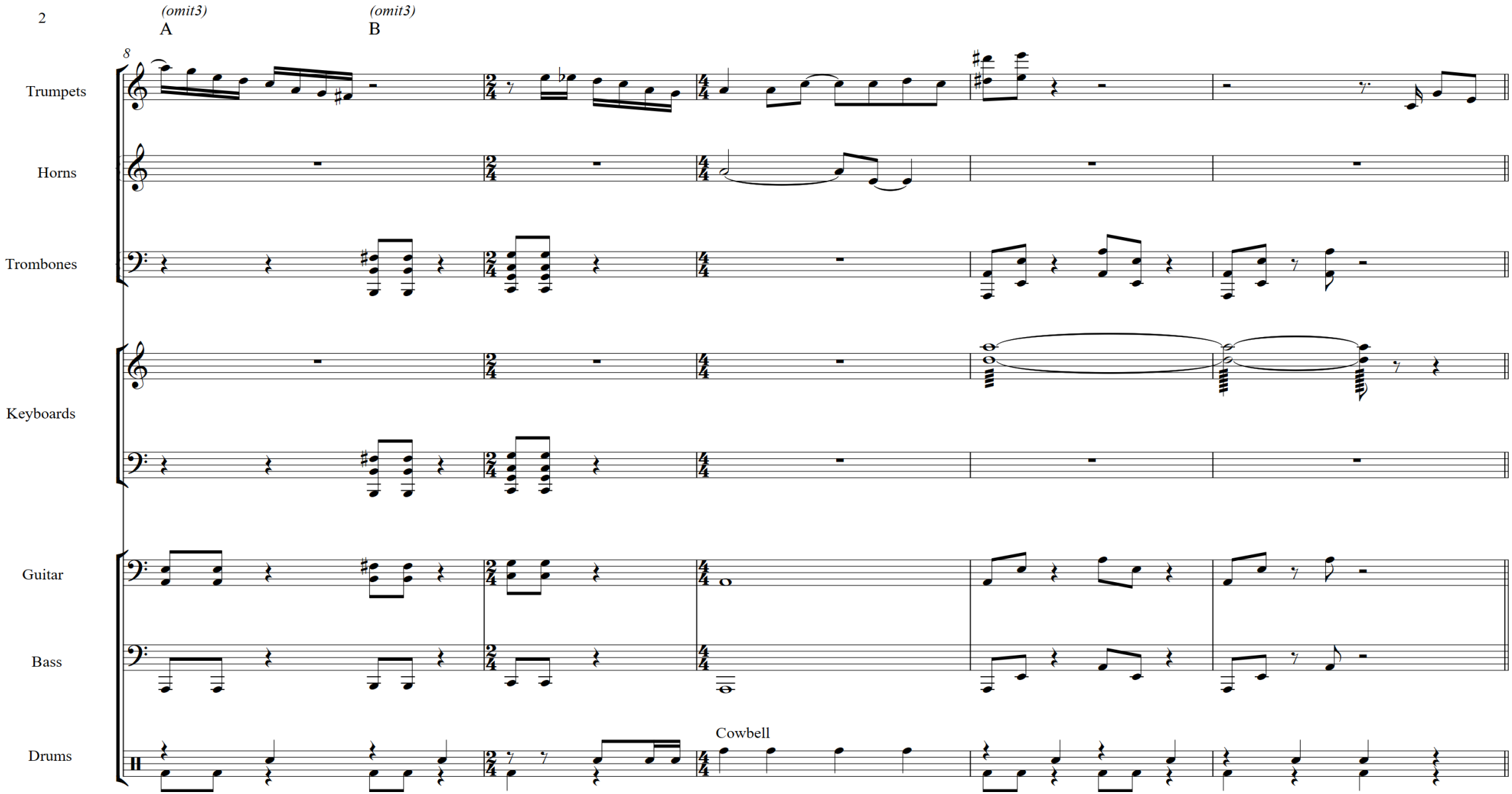


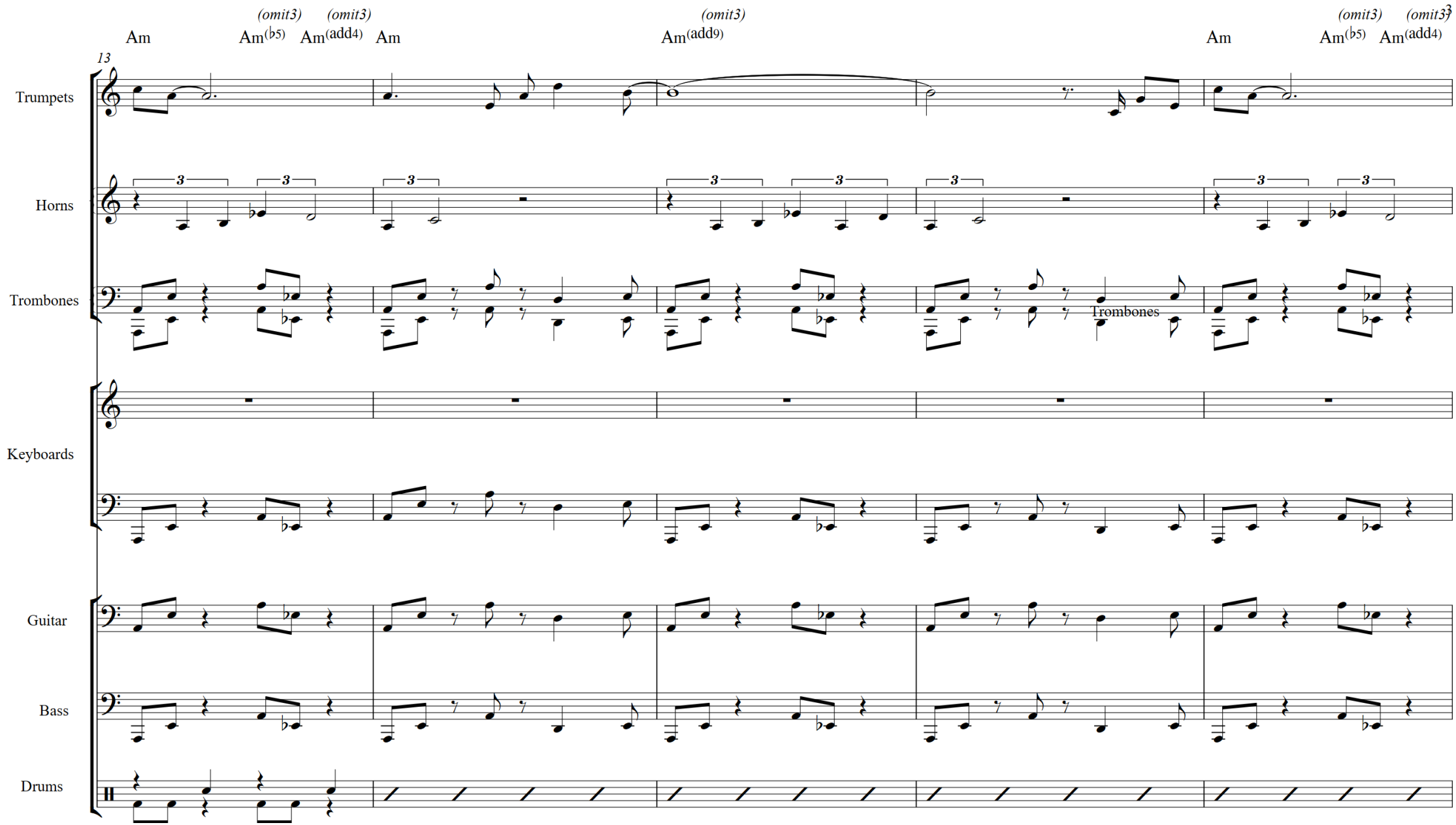
Basically, the **bottom two trombones** are playing from a chord that is a semitone higher than the **top two notes of the trombones and all the trumpets**

If we look at the trombones, we will see the top two notes (Eb and C) conform to the trumpet chords, but the bottom two notes **(A and E)** are a semitone up from what *would* have been there if the chord was an Ab; **the trombones are playing as if the chord is an A.** The bottom two trombones maintain this going through all six chords of the final two bars.




(#4)
G(add2)
(omit3)
C/G
C/E
Bm7
C
Trumpets
Horns
Trombones
Police Siren sound
glissando
glissando
glissando
glissando
glissando
glissando
glissando
glissando
Keyboards
Guitar
Bass
Drums


(omit3)
A
(omit3)
B
8
Trumpets
Horns
Trombones
Keyboards
Guitar
Bass
Drums
Cowbell


13
Am
Am(♭5)
(omit3)
Am(add4)
(omit3)
Am
Am(add9)
(omit3)
Am
Am(♭5)
(omit3)
Am(add4)
(omit3)
3
Trumpets
Horns
Trombones
Trombones
Keyboards
Guitar
Bass
Drums

Am7
(omit3)
E
(omit3)
(b9)
E(♯5)
(omit3)
E7(♯9)
(omit3)
E
(omit3)
(b9)
E(♯5)
(omit3)
E7(♯9)
A♭/A
D/E♭
D♭/D
A♭/A
C♭/C
D♭/D
18
Trumpets
Horns
Trombones
Keyboards
Guitar
Bass
Drums

Quincy Jones is a consummate musician, composer and arranger, and he is a great ambassador for the idea of **learning to read music** – something that statistically, in Britain, a majority of players **do not do**. There are over 40,000 musicians in the UK and **less than 5% read.**

- It has never been easier to learn how to read music.

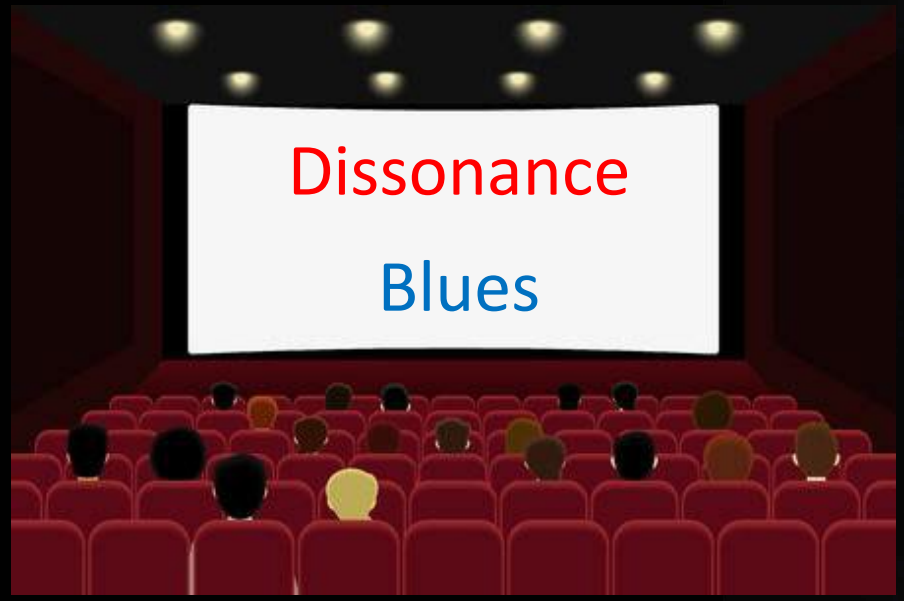
- Previously attached to availability, opportunity, privilege.

- Now anyone can learn it.

- There are under 3,000 film composers in the UK – 95% of them read.

The argument for reading as a film score composer isn't that all composers consult notation when they conceptualise music - although many do - it is that **reading and hearing music** enables you to properly understand how music works and is constructed. To be able to see what you have created is to know it and understand it.

SG

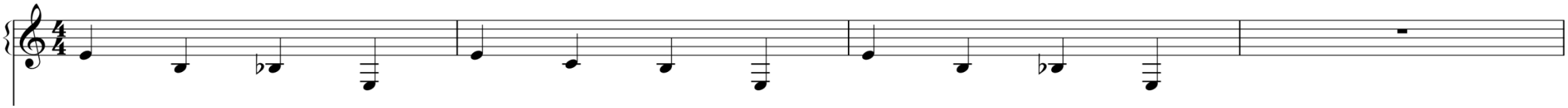


CAPE FEAR

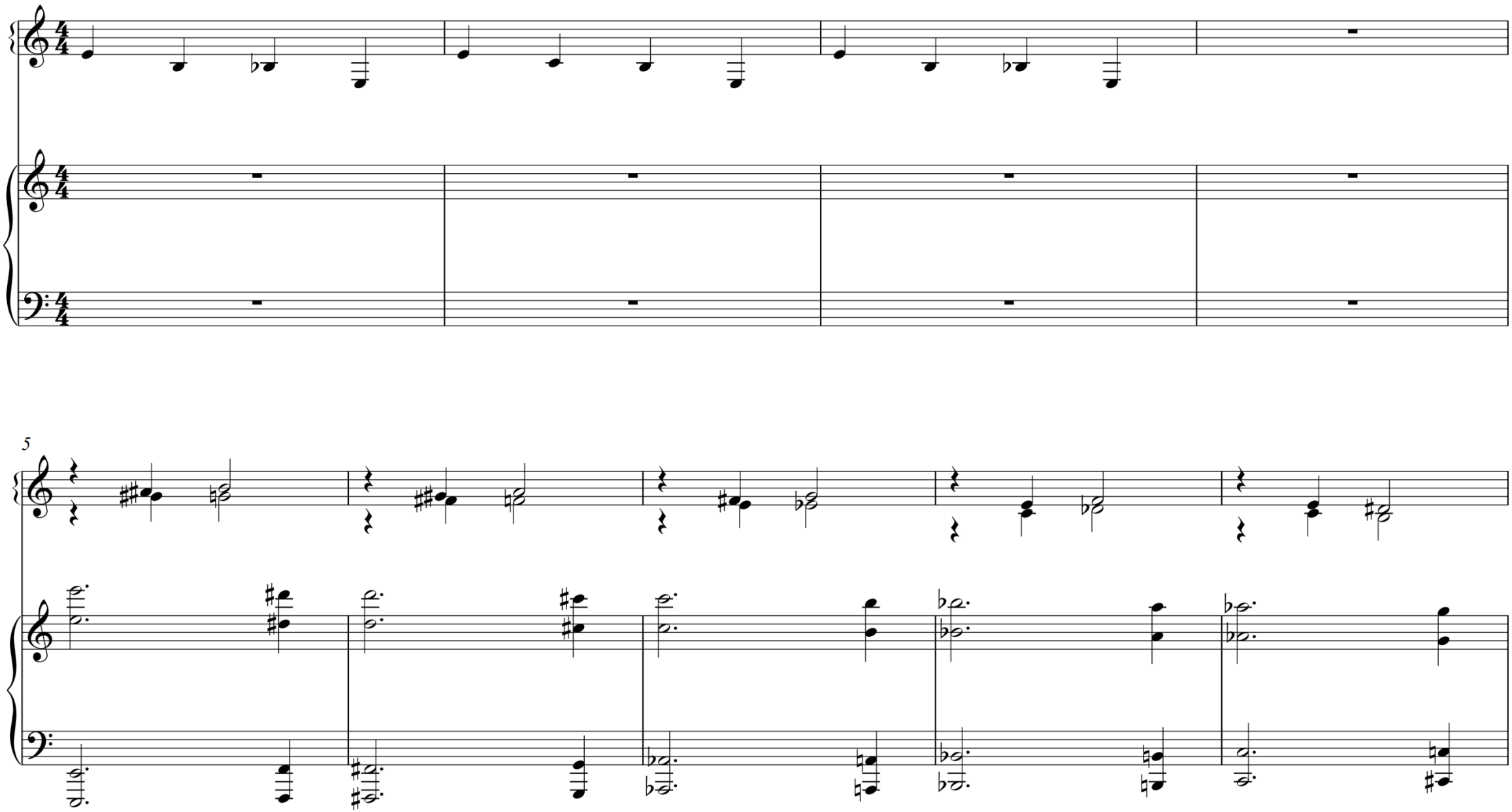
BERNARD HERRMANN

00.00 original / 00.2.40

Remake 00.00.24 vid/2.40 audio



Blues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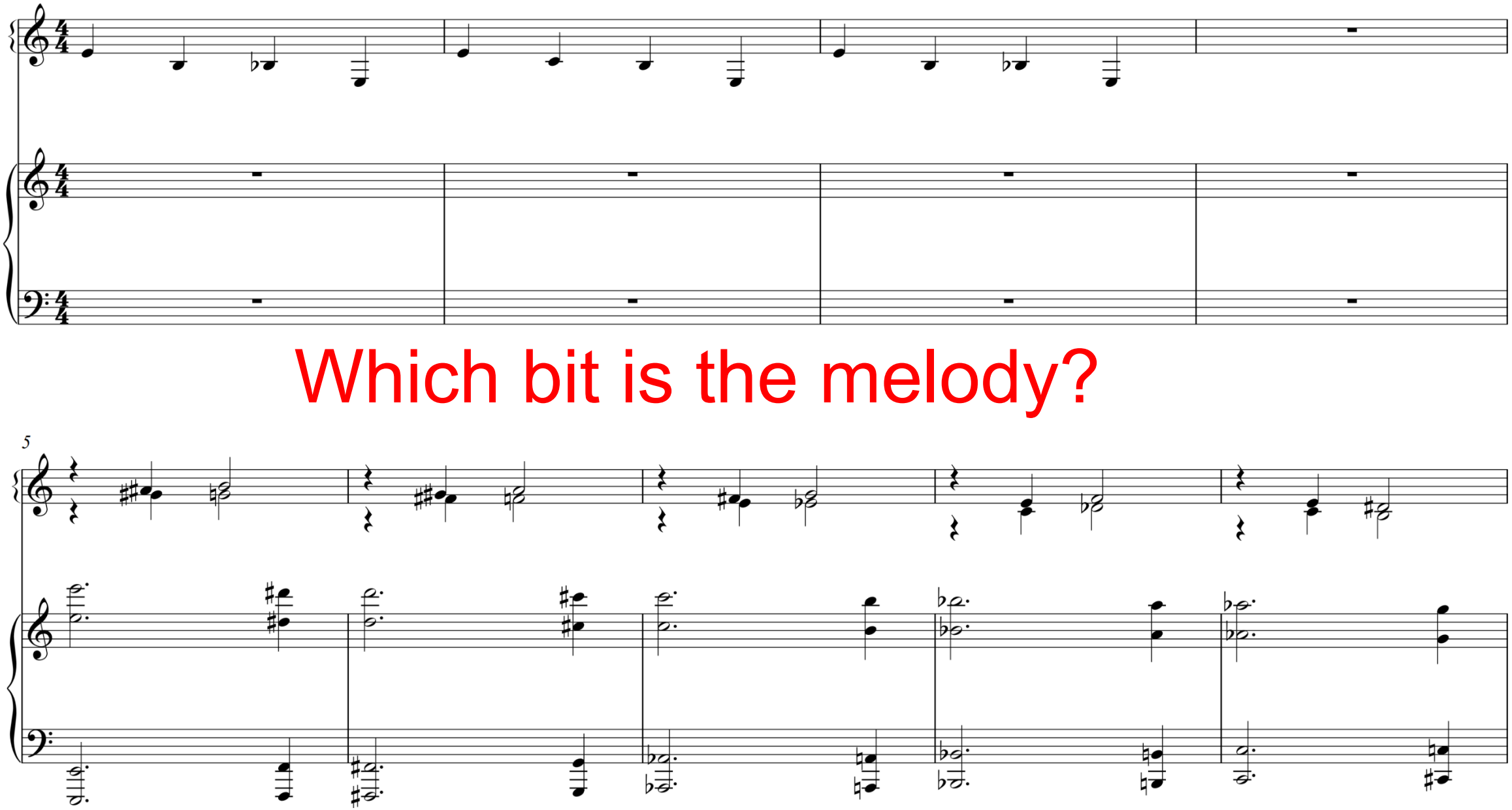
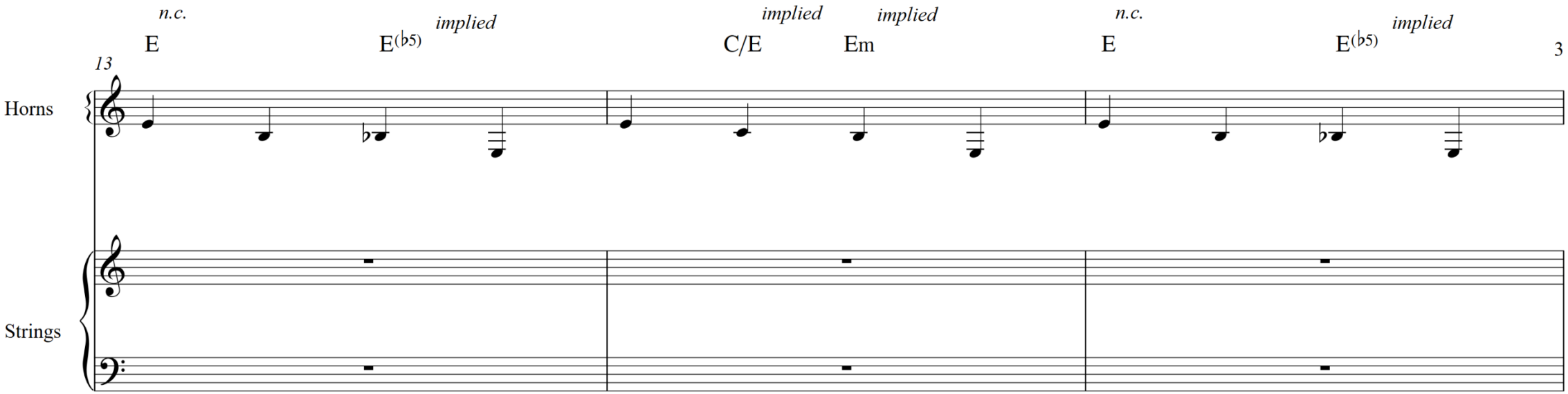

Which bit is the melody?
5

The search for meaning in music

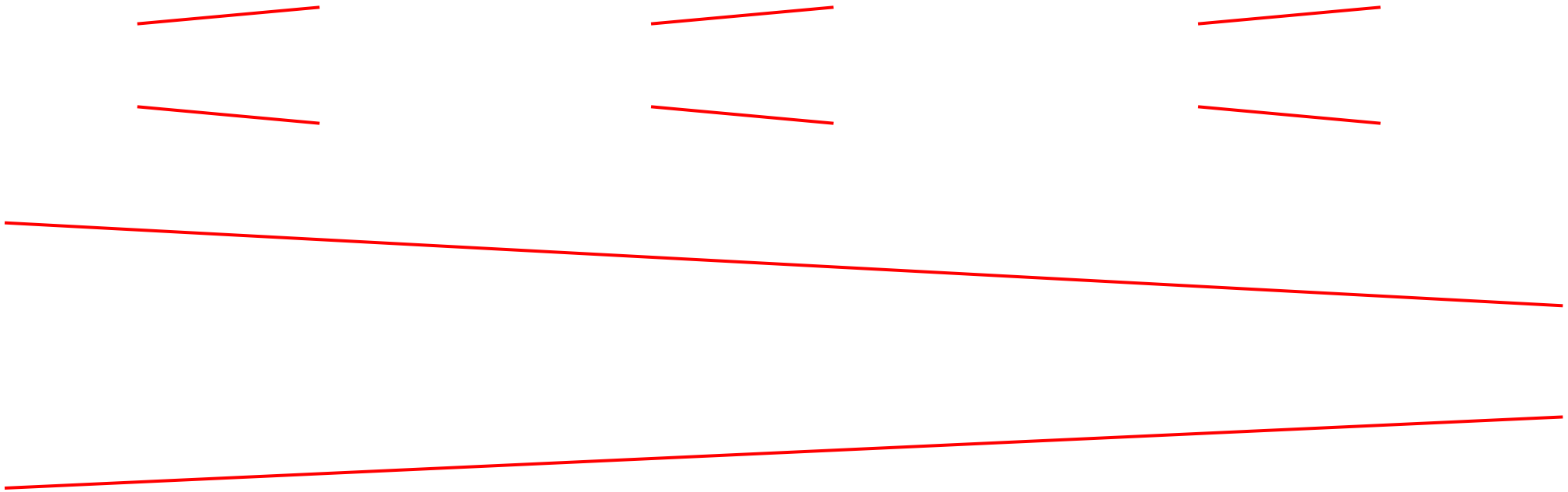
Herrmann: “Melody is not a place or time or instrument or stave – ultimately it is a **function. Melody can be everywhere.”**

We are programmed to go searching for the ‘melody’ just as we are programmed to search for the foreground and background in a picture

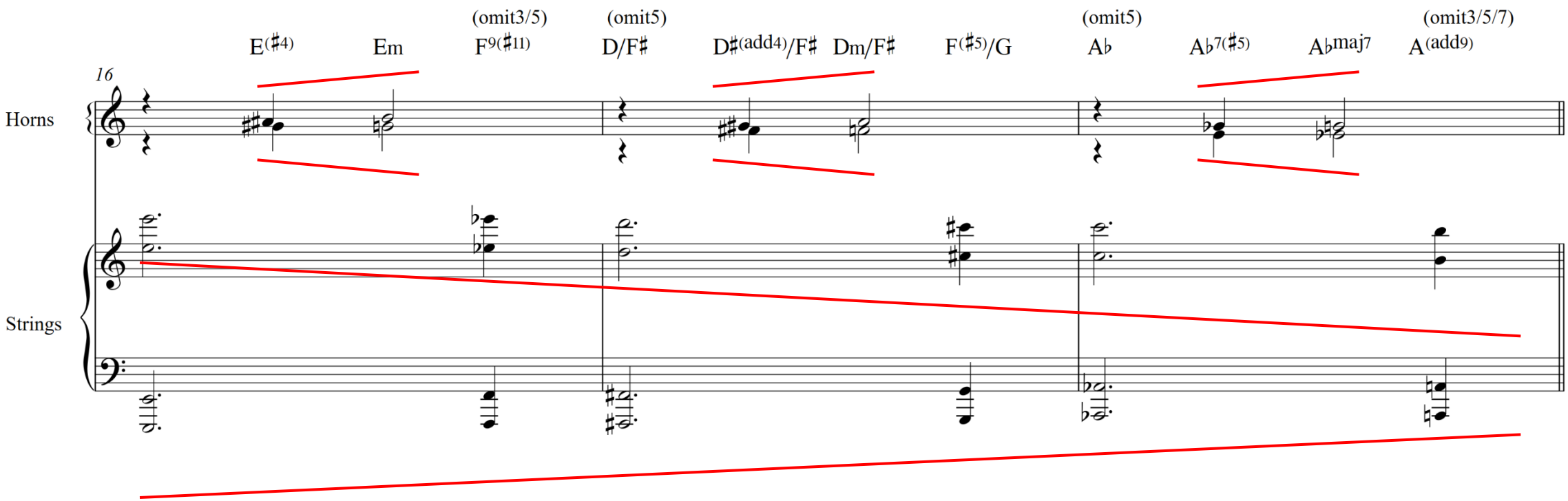
Unaccompanied melody – significance ?



Contrary motion running at different speeds / rates

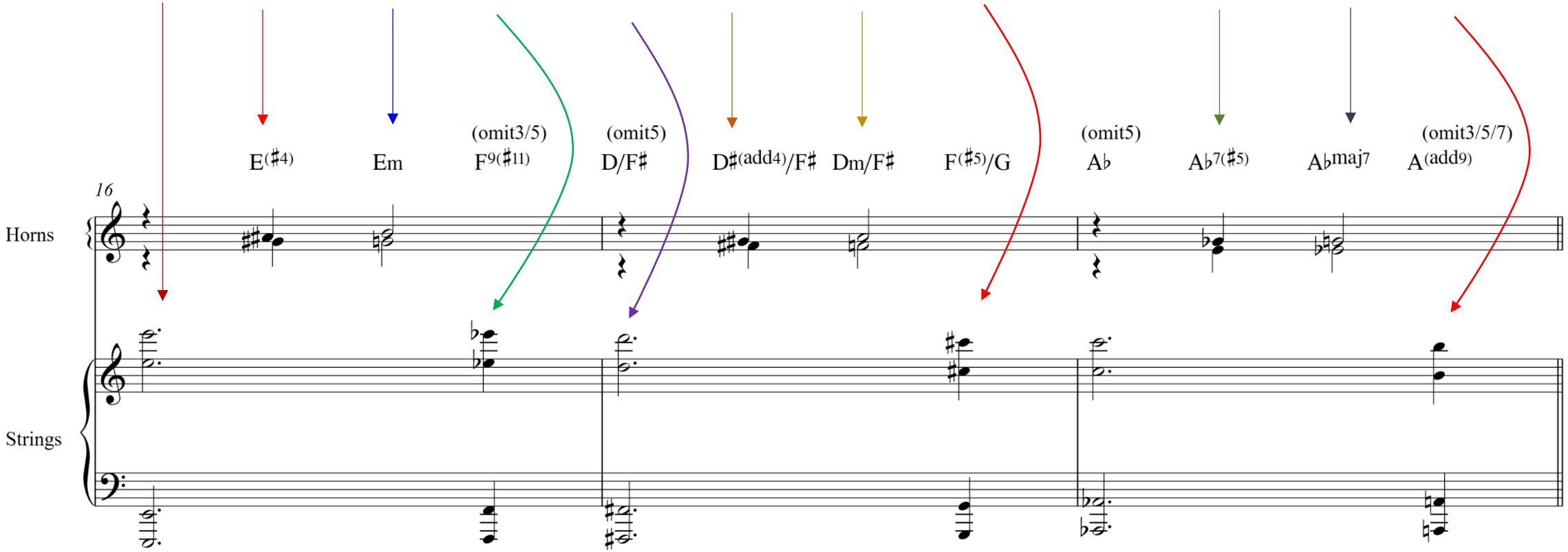


Contrary motion running at different speeds / rates

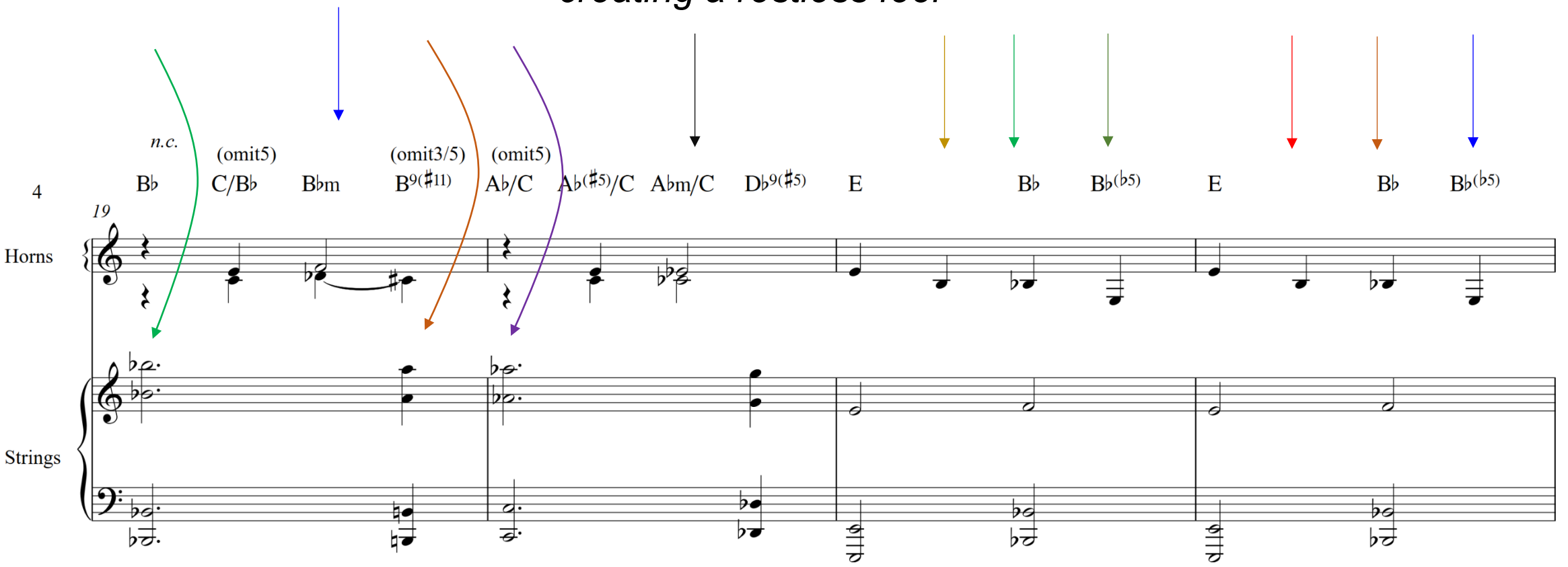


It’s never total dissonance – why ?

Harmonic colour changes **each beat**, *creating a restless feel*



Harmonic colour changes **each beat,**
creating a restless feel



Bernard Herrmann's big ideas

- Conceptualisation
- Questions the traditions of the day
- The triumph of harmony over melody

Bernard Herrmann's granular context

Which bit is the melody?

Unaccompanied melody – horizontal harmony

Not total dissonance – dissonance needs to rub off consonance

Melody is a function, not a specific instrument or section or a 'place'

Harmonic colour changes almost by the beat

“I don’t need people to walk down the street humming the theme from ‘Psycho’. I don’t expect them to remember it musically. I just want them to remember that it terrified them.”