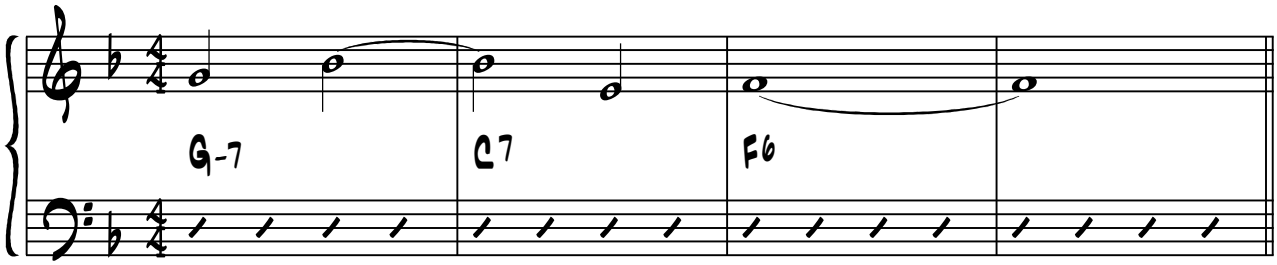
Getting Out - The Art of Endings

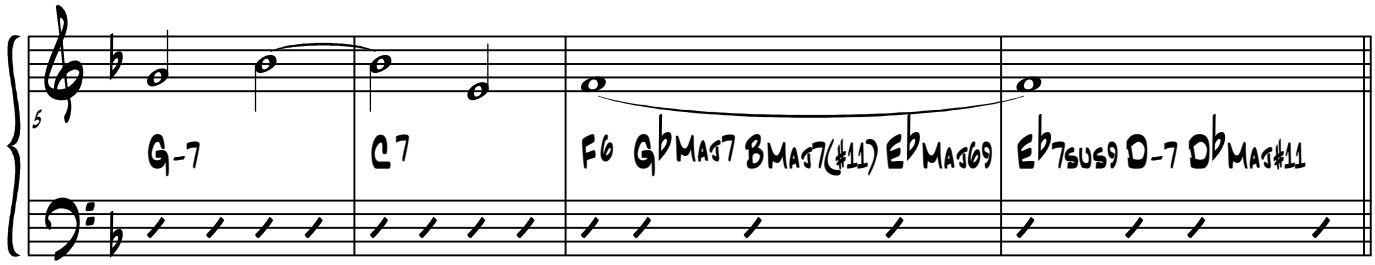
Jamey Simmons

As gigging opportunities playing jazz standards have become much more rare, it seems necessary to spend some time on ENDING tunes. The following endings to tunes are very common in gigging and should be tried at jam sessions and live gigs. For convenience, let's use the Last 4 bars of the tune "Bye Bye, Blackbird" as our departure point. Remember that you will have to practice some of these endings in other keys and experiment using them in context. Horn players and singers should try them on the piano.

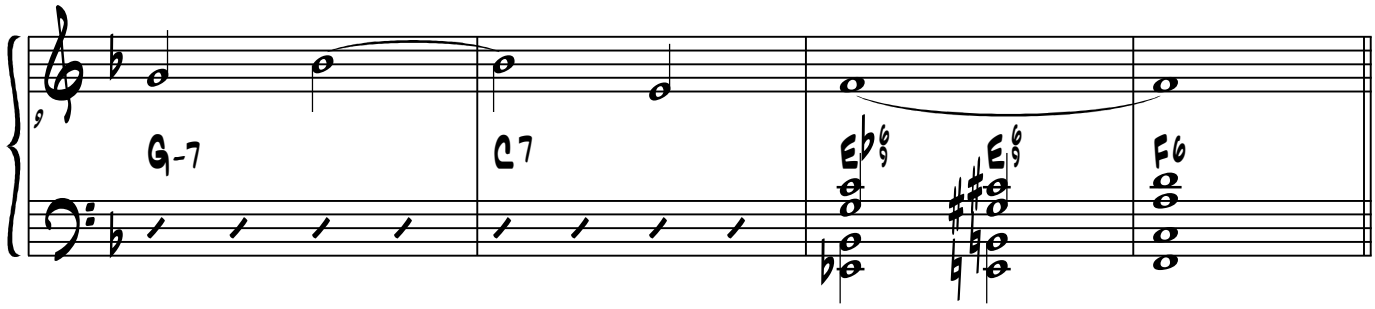
Here's the basic ending cadence:



The easiest possible solution to the pedestrian ending above is a **SUBSTITUTION ENDING CHORD**. With a melody ending on the tonic pitch, here are some possibilities:



A variation on this is the one I think of as the "Ellington/Strayhorn ending". We also find it in the tune "Seven Steps to Heaven". This has 2 substitution chords.



This may be a good time to remind everyone that the technique of using rubato is encouraged as a natural device in ending a tune.

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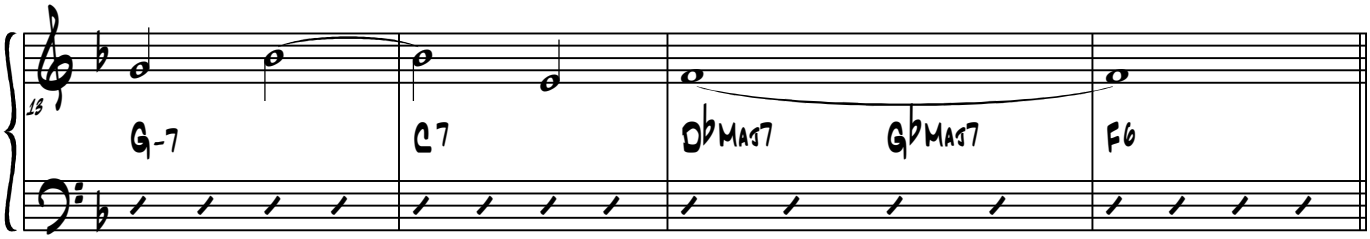
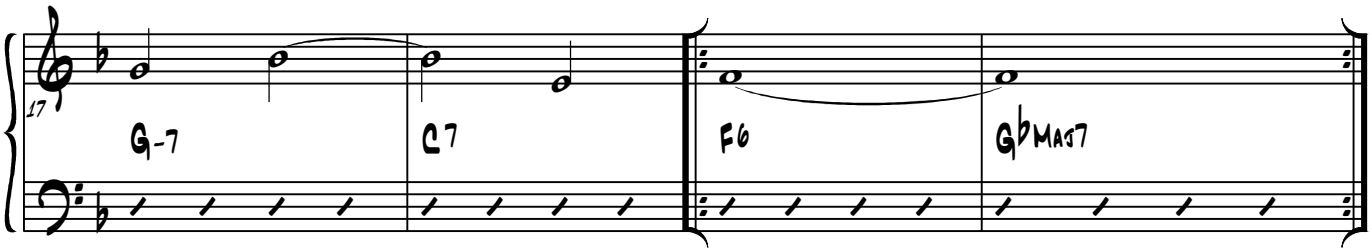
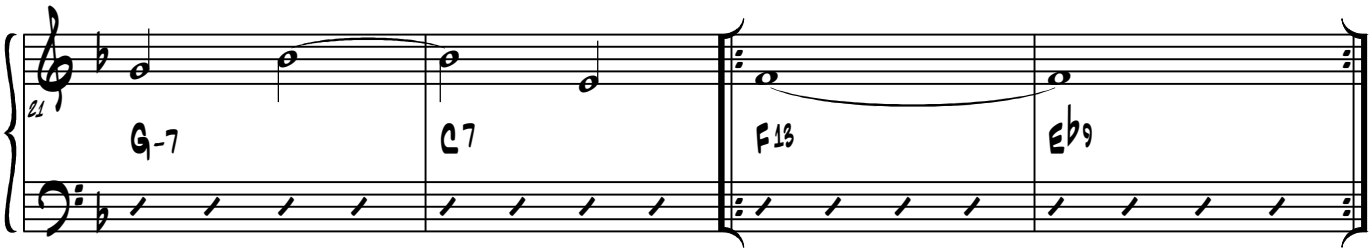
In this same vein, let's try thinking of two substitution ending chords. These two happen to resolve to the tonic. Can you come up with others?

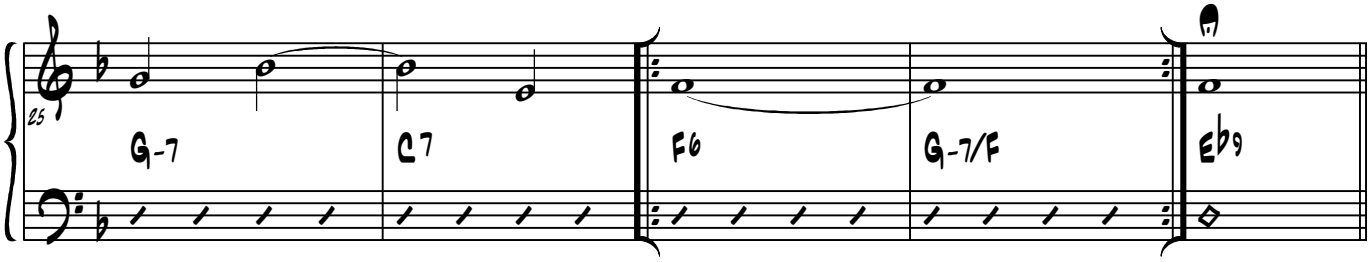


Another simple device is a **VAMP**. We can borrow some from the intros that we discussed for some of these. For more of an effect put a rhythm with the vamp. Here are a couple of common vamp endings.

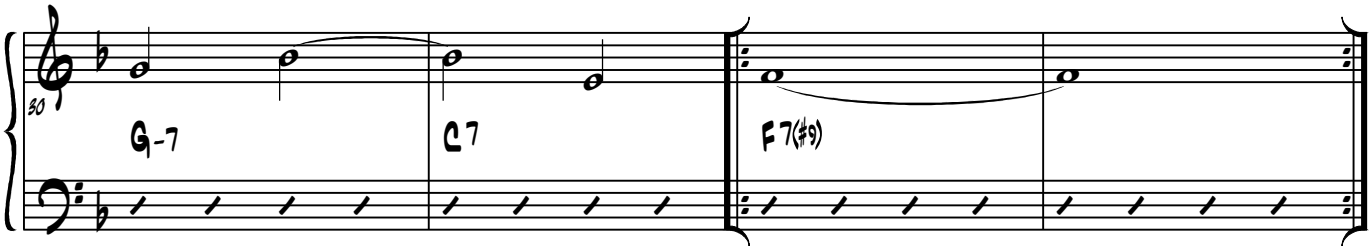




This one combines a vamp going to a substitution chord:



Here's a very simple approach!

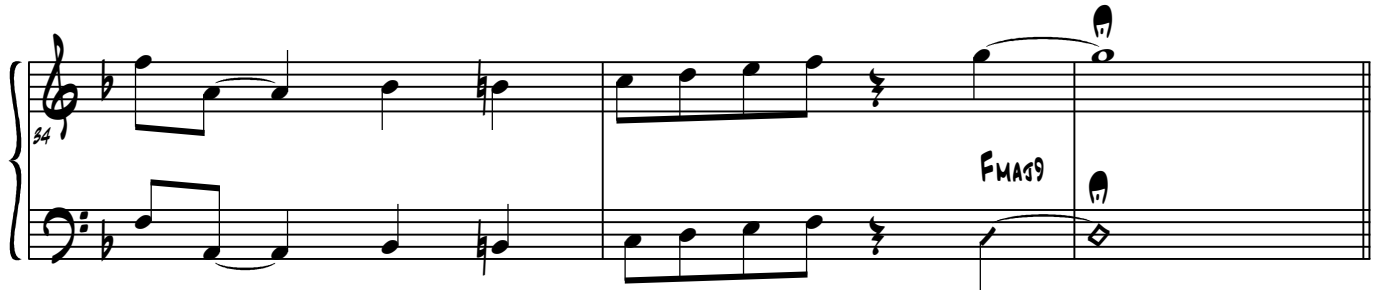


A tricky part of playing vamp endings is getting out of them. With good communication, eye contact, listening across the group and perhaps someone leading the group, endings become clearer.

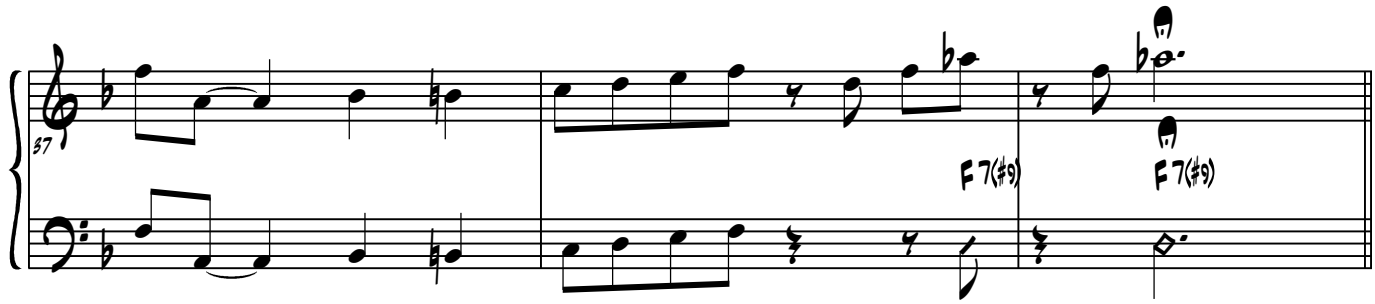
The third way of ending a tune is ending it with an ending **created by composers or performers for a specific tune.** Some examples of this would be -

- A night in Tunisia
- Take the A train
- Various Count Basie endings
- Joy Spring
- Star Eyes
- Round Midnight
- Bebop tunes

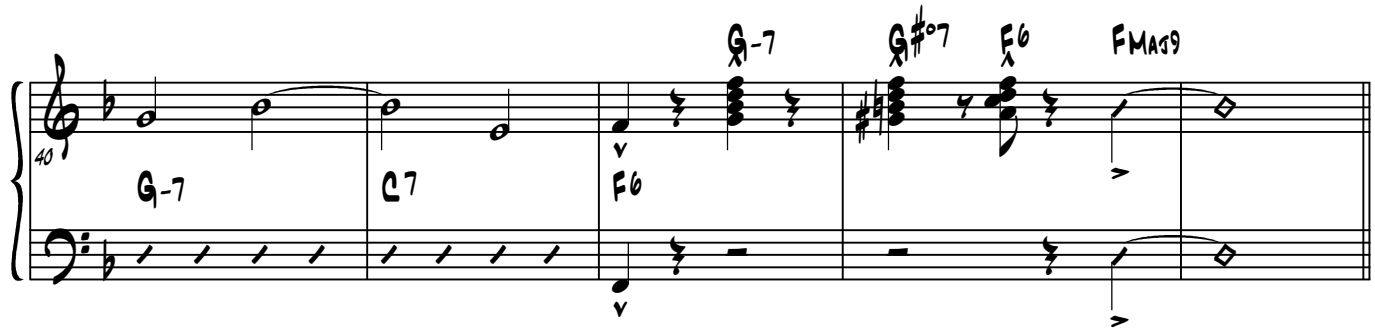
The most used of these is the **A Train** ending. Everyone should be able to play this in all keys!



Miles' 50s quintet used this ending but changed it even further:



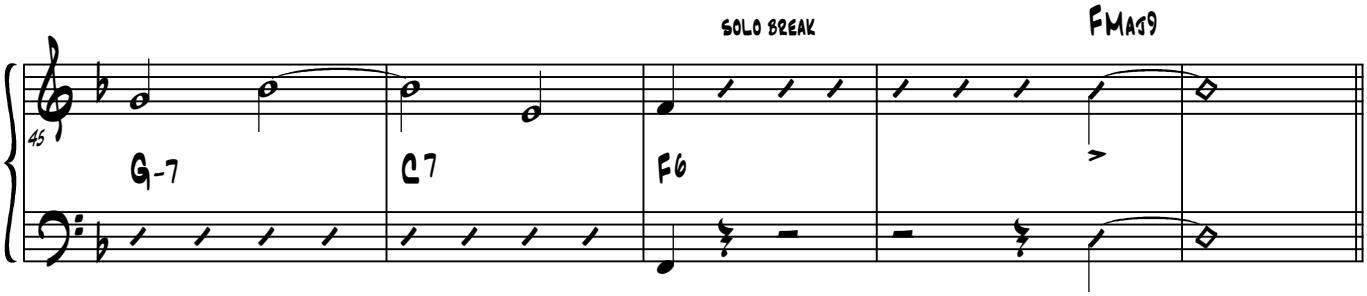
Every pianist and guitarist should know the "**Count Basie**" ending in every key.



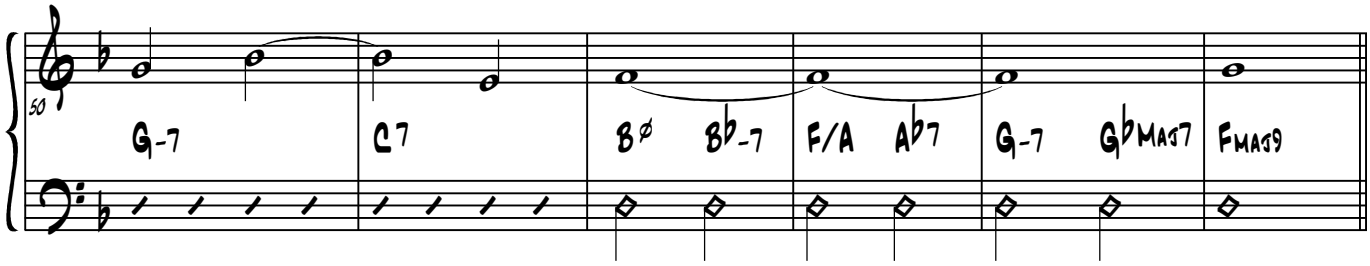
Thinking ii-7, step up chromatically to a double diminished (vii07/iii-), to a I 6 chord in first inversion.

Another very common and simple ending is what I call the **New Orleans or "Meet in 4" Ending.**

Or, try a substitute chord!

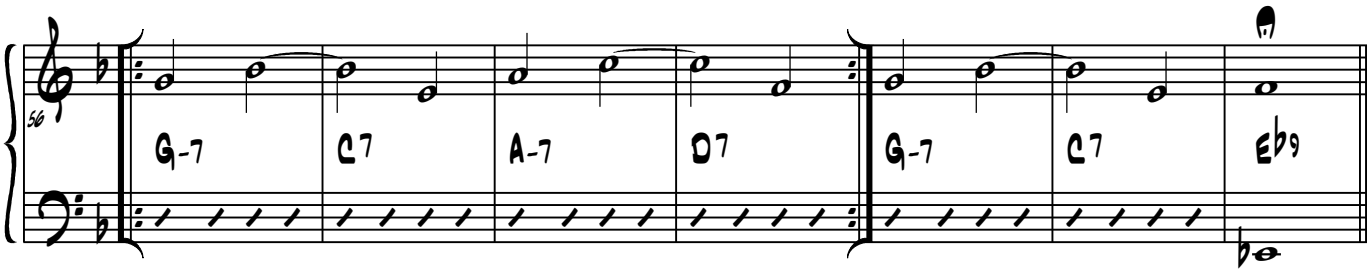


Here's a good one that can also be used for an intro. Let's call this the **Descending from the #4 Ending.** The trick is to find the tritone of the key that you're in and come down chromatically from there.



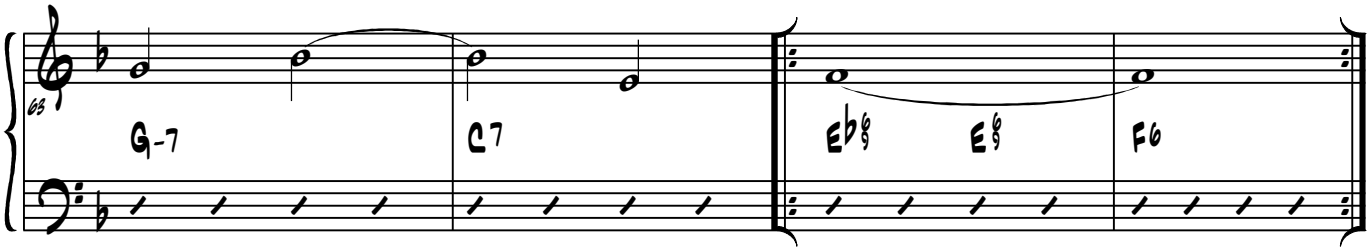
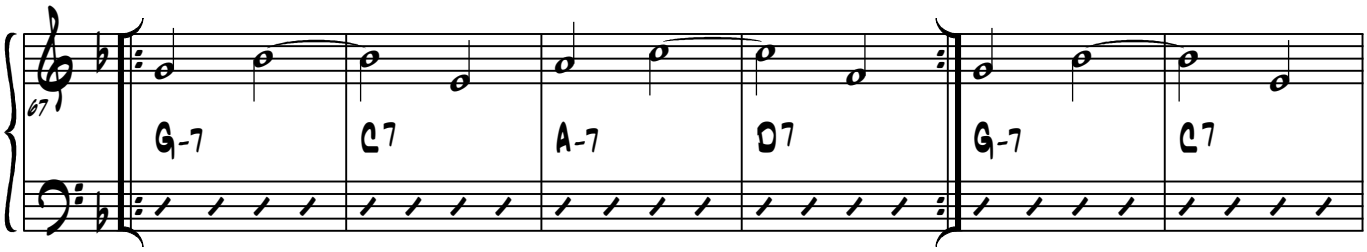
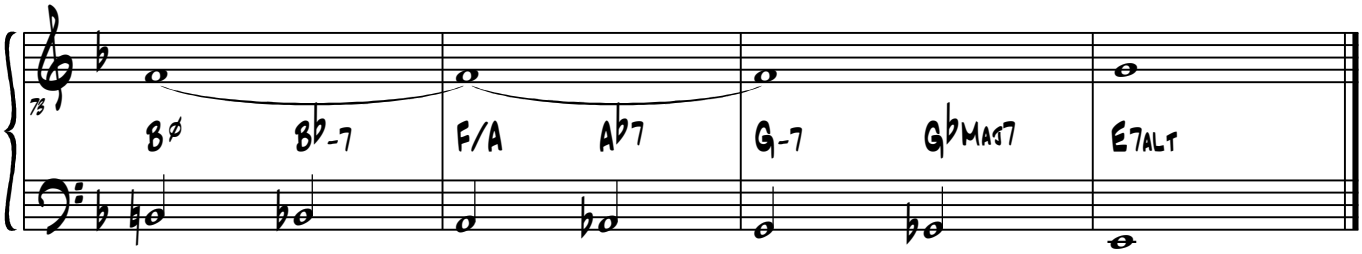
Miles Davis and John Coltrane loved using the **III VI II V turnaround** as an ending device. In fact sometimes they would use it inside the blowing for an energy building device leading into the next solo. You may have to figure out a way to get out of the turnaround to the final chord. Usually a nod of the head and playing the melody will communicate that it's time to end.

Substitution chord!!!



Obviously, some of these endings are easier in a live jam session setting than others, and they all can be used in arranging for your group. What is really fun is combining techniques. Which ones am I using in the following examples?

#1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