Barnhouse Jazz Band

NOW'S THE TIME

Lennie Niehaus

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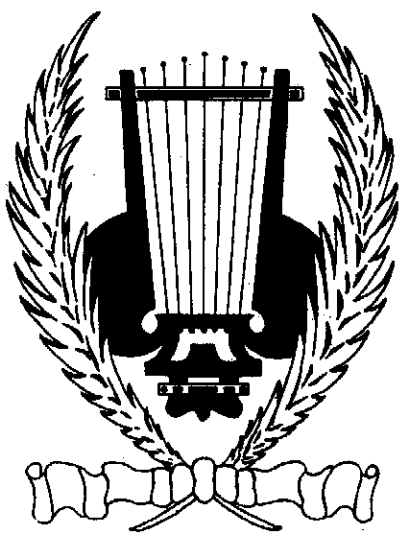
Barnhouse
Archive Edition



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"Bird" Lives!
by LEONARD FEATHER

(Reprinted by permission from the August 1988 issue of JAZZTIMES.)

As I write this, in early May, the movie *Bird* is a couple of months away from its American release, but it is impossible to resist the temptation to write about it so far in advance. The fact is, *Bird* works.

Since I saw it at a private screening at Warner Brothers, *Bird* has had its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, where it won two awards: one for Forest Whitaker, who plays the title role, and a technical award, accepted by Clint Eastwood but effectively for Lennie Niehaus' musical direction. It is fairly safe to assume, too, that Whitaker will be in the running for an Oscar nomination.

Bird, in short, is the first truly authentic motion picture ever made about an actual jazz musician: not fiction like *Round Midnight* or semi-fiction like *Lady Sings the Blues* or sheer nonsense like *The Benny Goodman Story. Bird* is a triumph on several levels; compellingly written by Joel Olianski, superbly directed by Clint Eastwood, acted with total conviction by Forest Whitaker (and by Diane Venora as Chan), it is believable from the first minute to the last.

As much as anyone, Lennie Niehaus deserves his share of the credit for a sound track that is a true technological miracle. Charlie Parker's original solos were isolated; everything else on the old monaural tapes or records was erased, and replaced by state-of-the-art sound with such musicians as Monte Alexander, Barry Harris or Water Davis Jr. on piano, Jon Faddis or Red Rodney on trumpet, Ray Brown on bass, John Guerin on drums, and here and there, an enlarged string section that greatly enhances such numbers as *April in Paris* and *Laura.* In other words, it's as though Bird were still among us, recording with today's musicians in today's digital sound.

Five minutes into the film, I had forgotten that this was Forest Whitaker, an actor. His portrayal reflects countless hours studying Bird, discussing his personality traits with anyone who knew him.

The balance between bittersweet drama and comedy is well maintained; the scenes involving Mike Zelnicker, who plays Red Rodney, are based on fact (Rodney pretending to be an albino so the white southern audiences would tolerate his presence in a black band; Rodney taking Bird with him to play a Jewish wedding). But the contrasting aspects of the complex character who was Bird — kind, articulate, phenomenally gifted, uncontrolled, strung out, impulsive, generous — are effectively brought into play in what is, of course, ultimately a downbeat story.

There will be complaints that this is yet another movie about a junkie musician, yet the message comes across loud and clear that drugs, as Bird himself was the first to tell you, are devastatingly damaging. The scene toward the end, in which Bird and Chan try to live a peaceful life in a country home in Pennsylvania, is an accurate reflection of Bird's basic motivation, to which he was never able to remain loyal for more than short periods.

The music, from the inexorable flow of *Lester Leaps In* at the beginning to the heartbreaking sounds of *Parker's Mood* during the closing credits, is magnificent. A few tunes use Bird's solo from his original commercial recordings, but most are taken from rare tapes supplied by Chan, using airchecks from the Rockland Palace in Harlem and a couple of items taped when Bird visited Lennie Tristano's apartment. The soundtrack album on CBS, which, of course, includes complete numbers rather than the excerpts that dominate the film footage, is a unique document for which Niehaus and his chief engineer, Bob Fernandez, worked endless hours trying to match up every beat of each Parker solo and the new sounds that were added.

Nit-pickers may note that some of the important people in Bird's life are missing, but the dramatic license was not taken to excess. If Miles Davis didn't want to be represented, it was not central to Bird's story to involve him; as for Doris Parker, the other woman in Bird's later years, it was apparently deemed advisable to concentrate on the very close relationship with Chan. What comes across vividly is a portrait of an immensely gifted, driven man whose life was ruined by drugs but who left a magnificent musical legacy — one that Clint Eastwood, Niehaus and everyone else who took part in this project clearly respected.

Present plans call for an American premiere September 30 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, with a general release to follow a few weeks later.

Clint Eastwood, it was easy to discern in conversation with him, is prouder of this movie than of anything else he has ever done. He might well be; he has taken a project that could so easily have been botched (originally it was the property of Richard Pryor, who would have been all wrong for the role of Bird), and has produced and directed it with tender loving care.

If I may borrow a phrase long associated with Clint, he has made our day, or rather our decade, with this unprecedented example of how to treat a jazz movie subject with honesty and dedication.

LENNIE NIEHAUS

Lennie Niehaus' music career has been varied and most distinguished. Graduating cum laude from California State University-L.A. with a degree in composition he joined the Stan Kenton Orchestra as a feature Alto soloist where he won Downbeat magazine awards and recorded a number of albums. Many of them included his own arrangements. Later, he was to record six of his own albums with a "who's who" list of West Coast jazz greats.

More recently he has achieved considerable success as a composer for movies and TV films. Some of the latest film credits include "Tightrope," "City Heat," "Sesame Street Presents Follow That Bird," "Pale Rider," and "Heartbreak Ridge." Lennie has just finished work on the film score for "Bird," a new movie about the life of jazz giant Charlie Parker which will be released by Warner Bros. in the Fall of 1988.

In addition to his busy film writing work he continues to maintain an active career in the educational field where he composes and arranges music for jazz ensemble, concert band, and orchestra. He is well known as a clinician, Alto Saxophonist and adjudicator in high schools and colleges around the country.

From the Warner Brothers film "BIRD"

NOW'S THE TIME

CHARLIE PARKER
Arr. Lennie Niehaus

MODERATE SWING (♩=226) (♫=♪♪)

(STRAIGHT 8's)

(SOLI-UNIS.)

mf

(STRAIGHT 8's)

Fmi6 Bbmi6 Fmi6 Fmi6 Bbmi6 Fmi6

(CHORD SYMBOLS WRITTEN ON PART)

(CHORD SYMBOLS WRITTEN ON PART)

(S.D.)

(SOLO-TOMS)

(SOLO-TOMS)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

"NOW'S THE TIME" - Charlie Parker
©Atlantic Music Corp. December 1, 1945
©Renewed Atlantic Music Corp. December 4, 1972.
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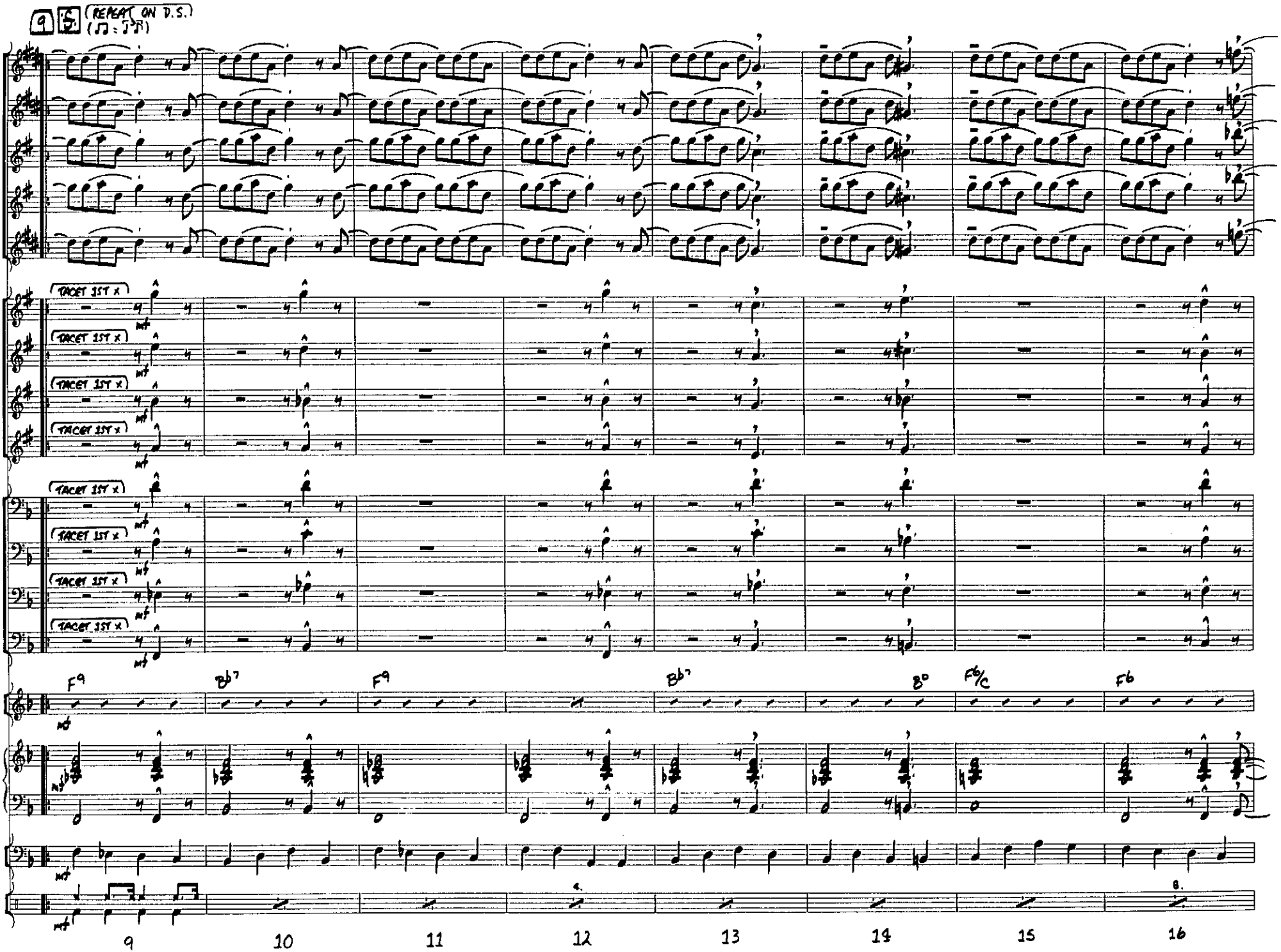
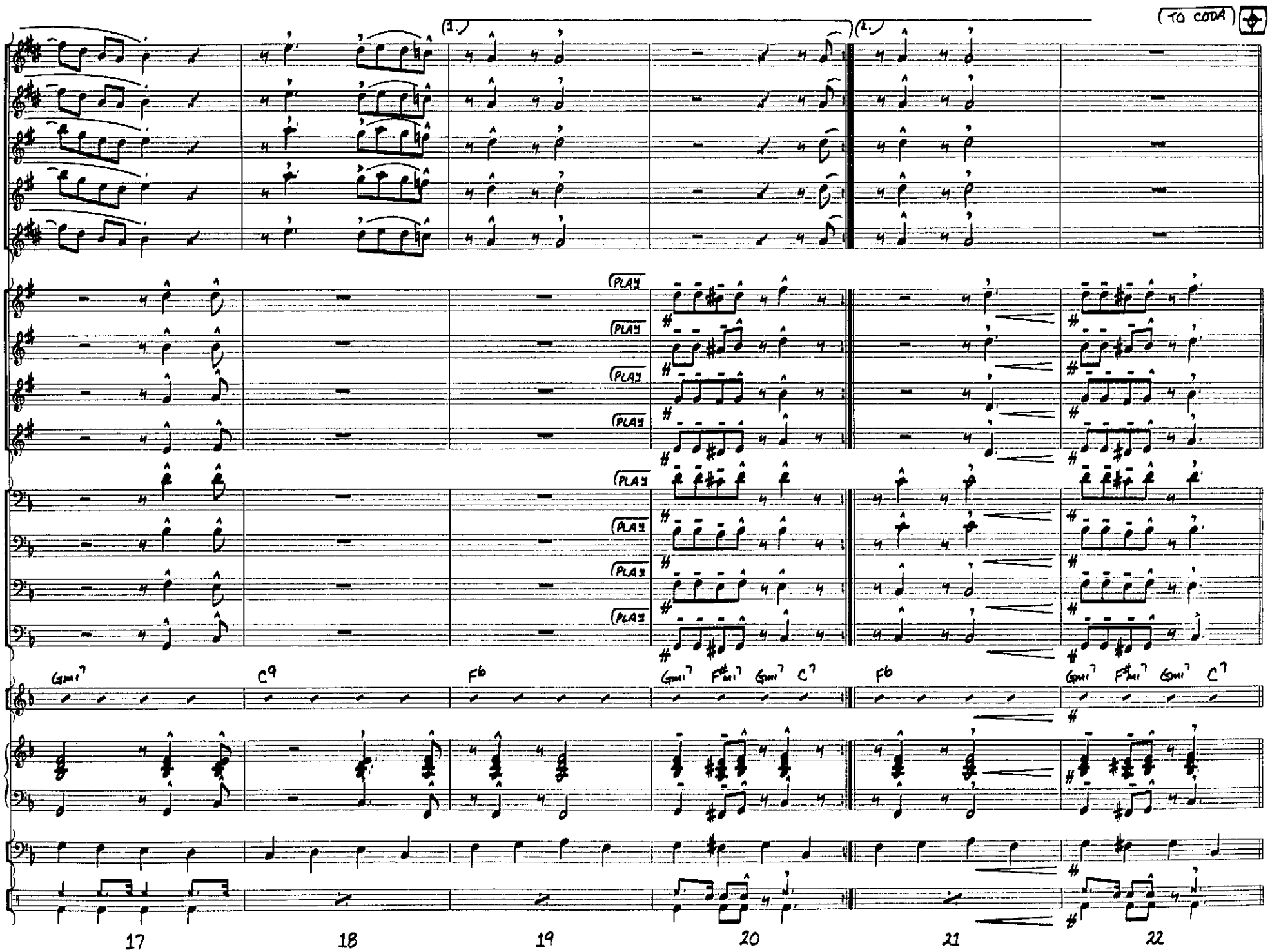
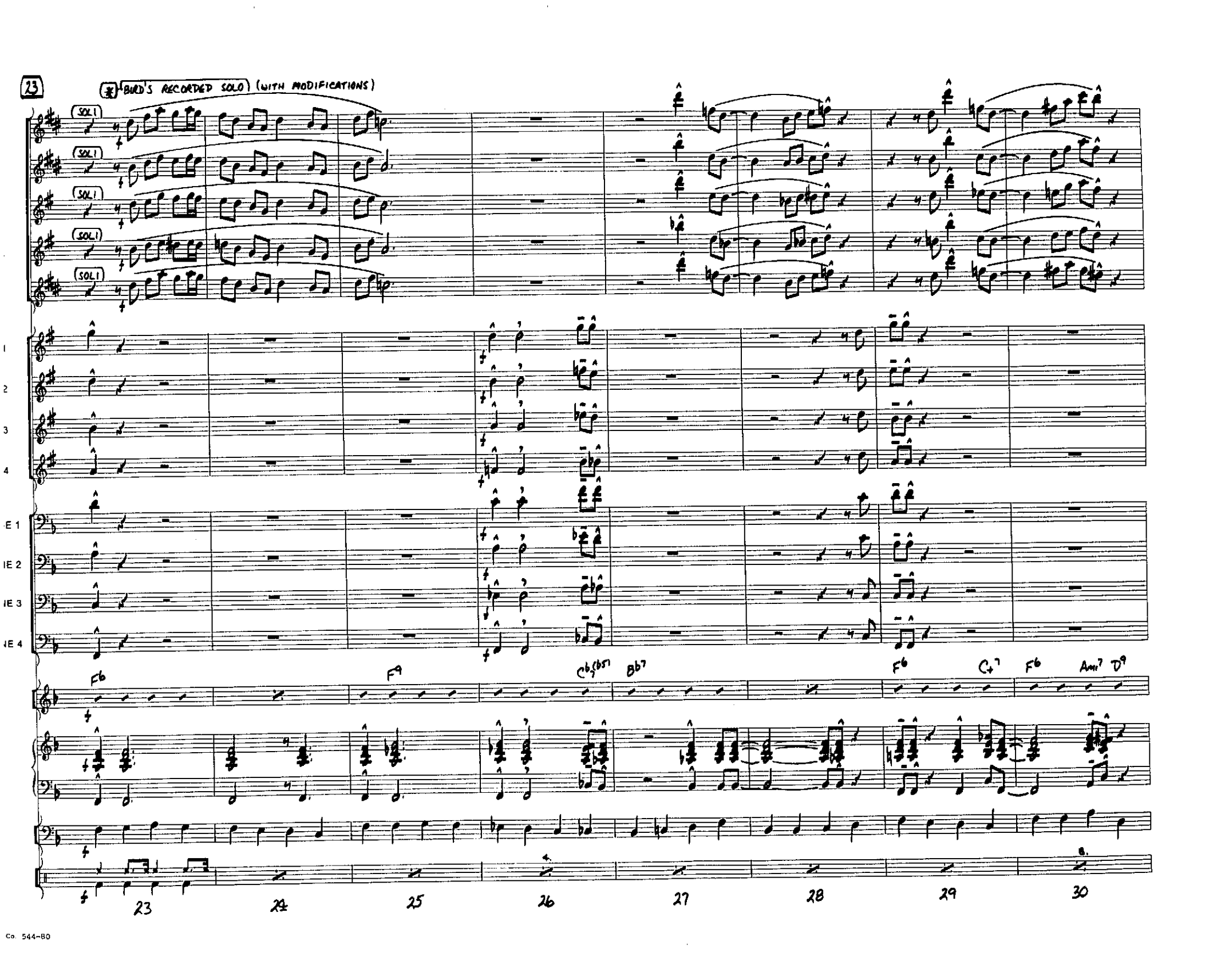
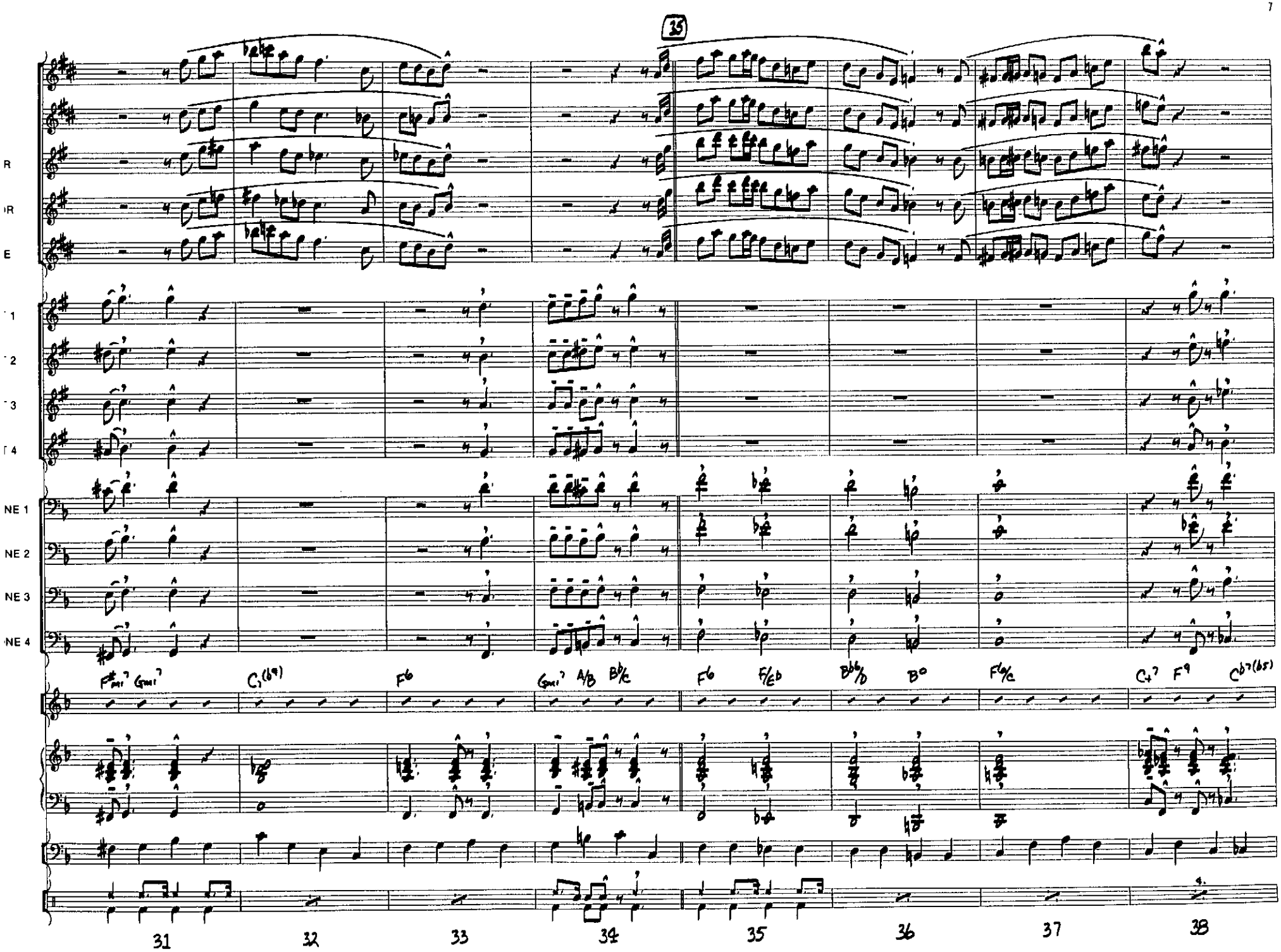
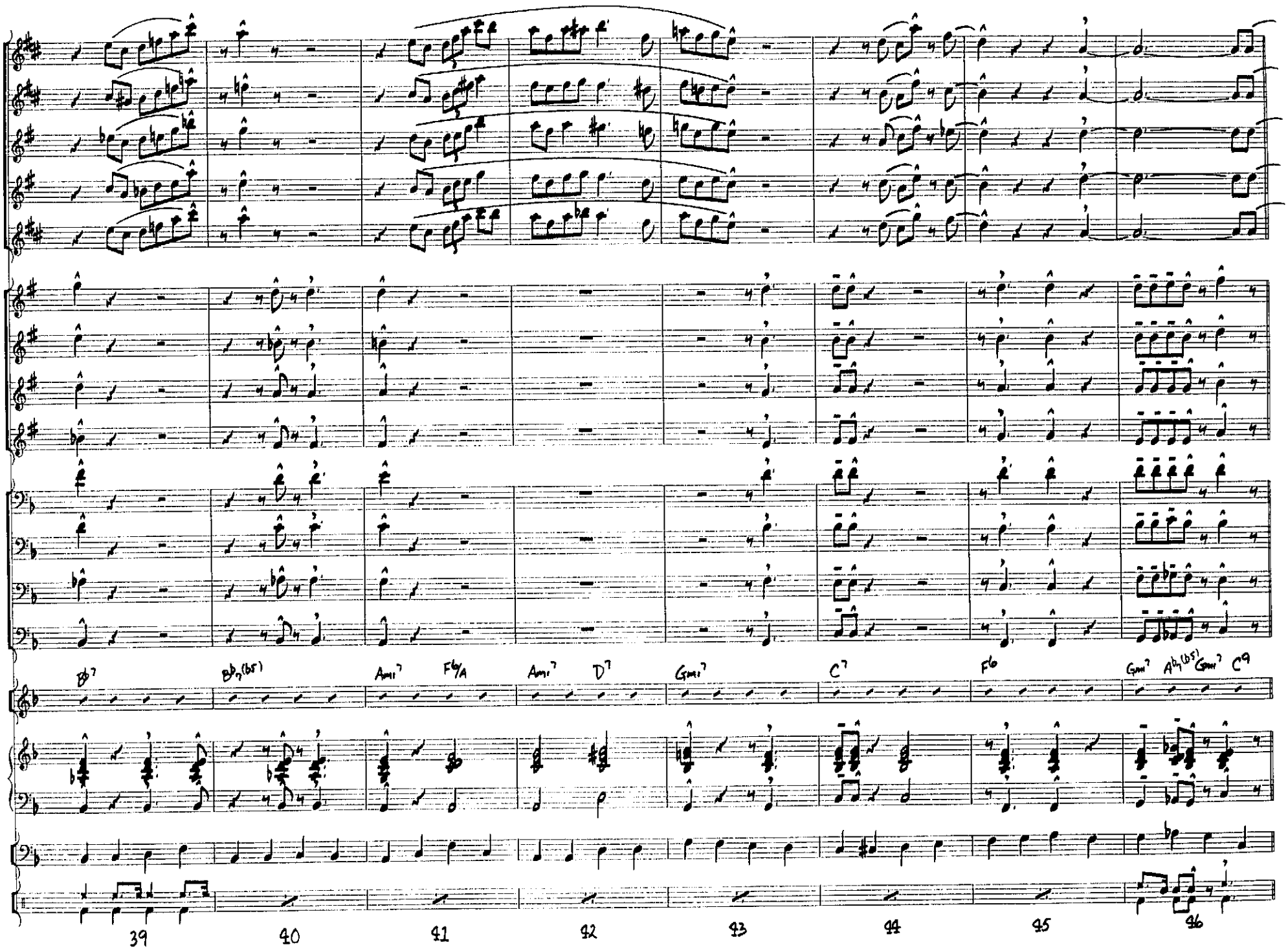
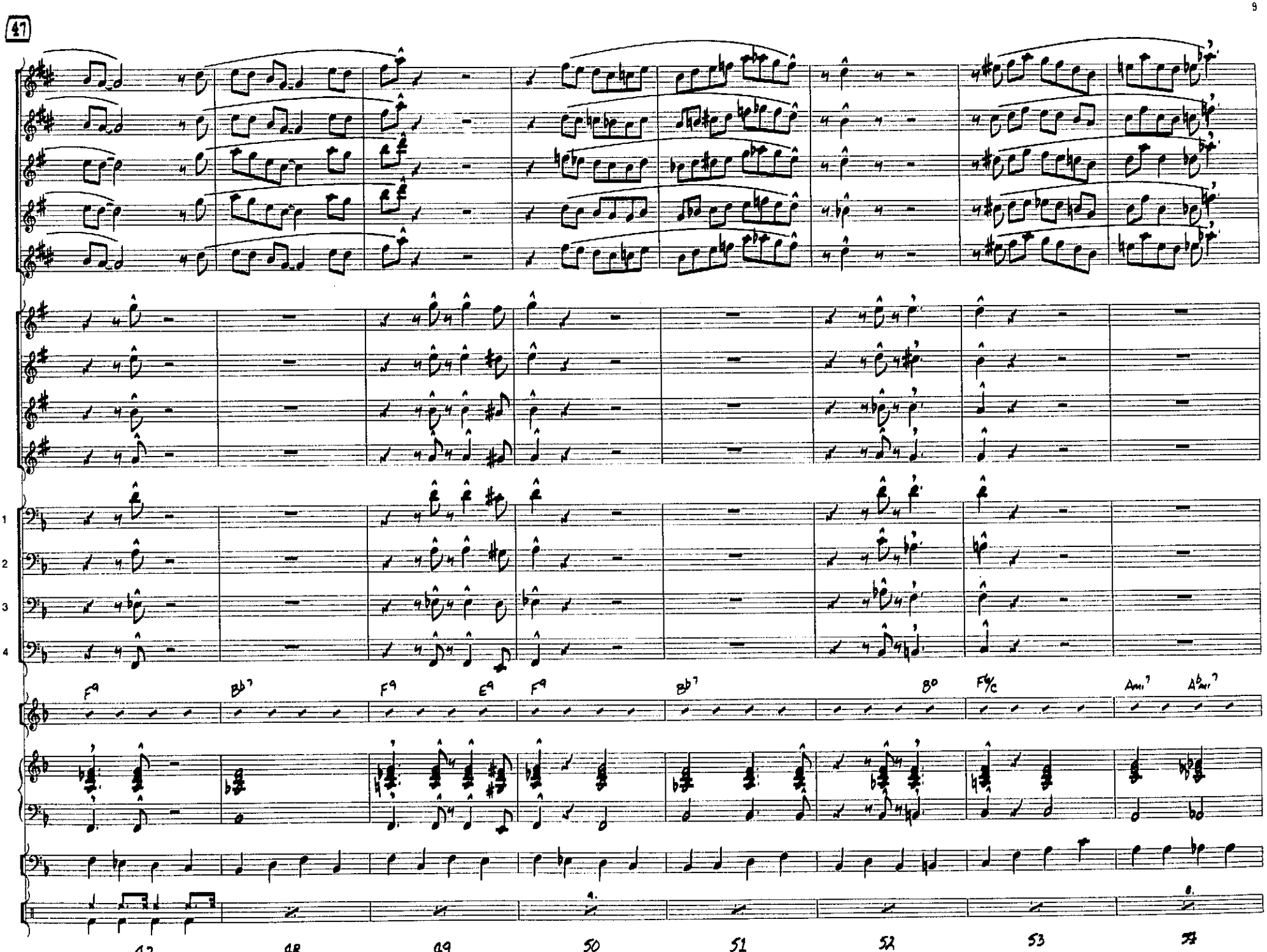

9
REPEAT ON D.S.
TACET 1ST X
F9
Bb7
F9
Bb7
B°
F6/C
F6
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16

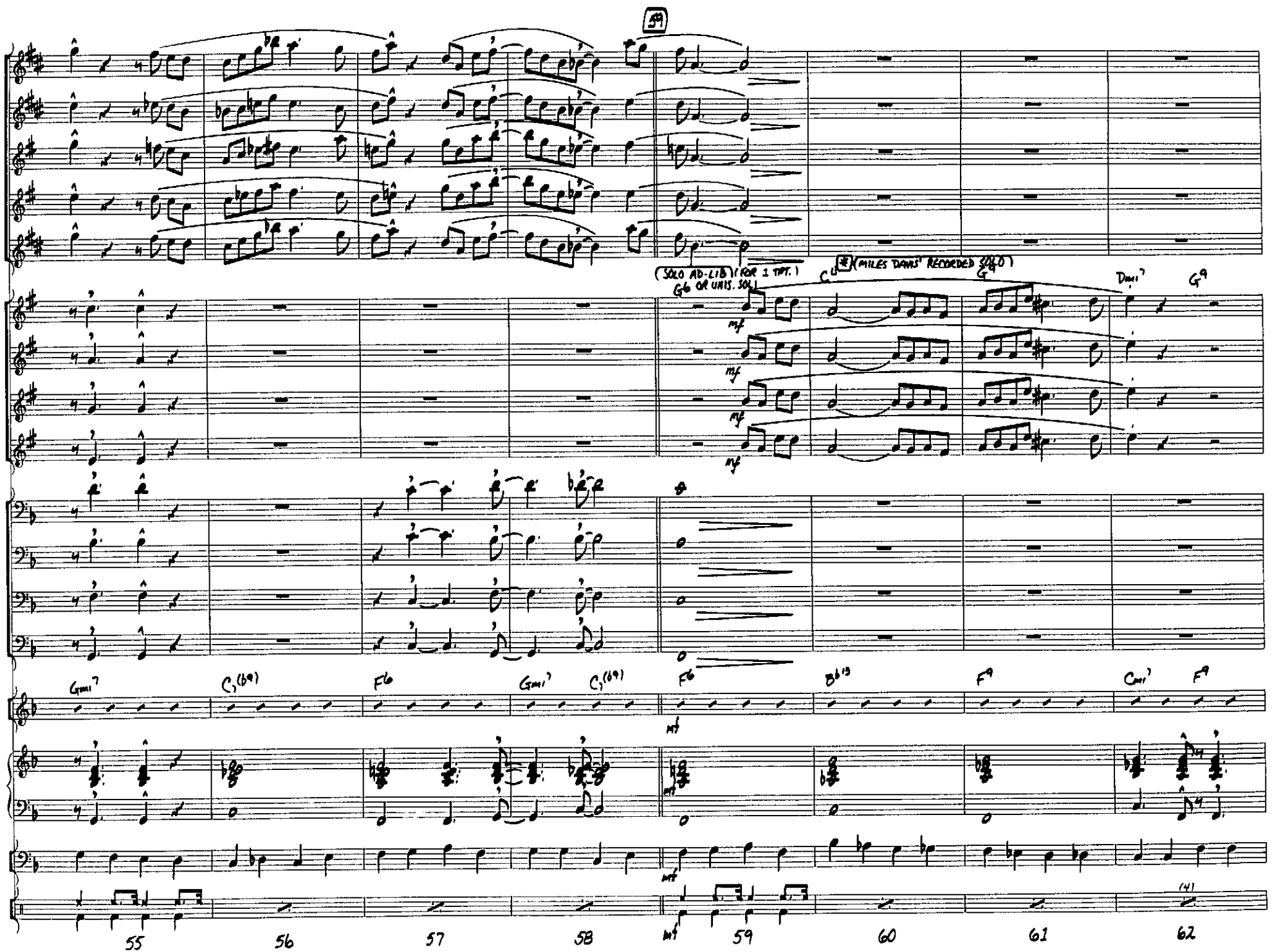

(TO CODA)
(1.)
(2.)
(PLAY)
Gmi7
C9
Fb
Gmi7
F#mi7
Gmi7
C7
Fb
Gmi7
F#mi7
Gmi7
C7
17
18
19
20
21
22

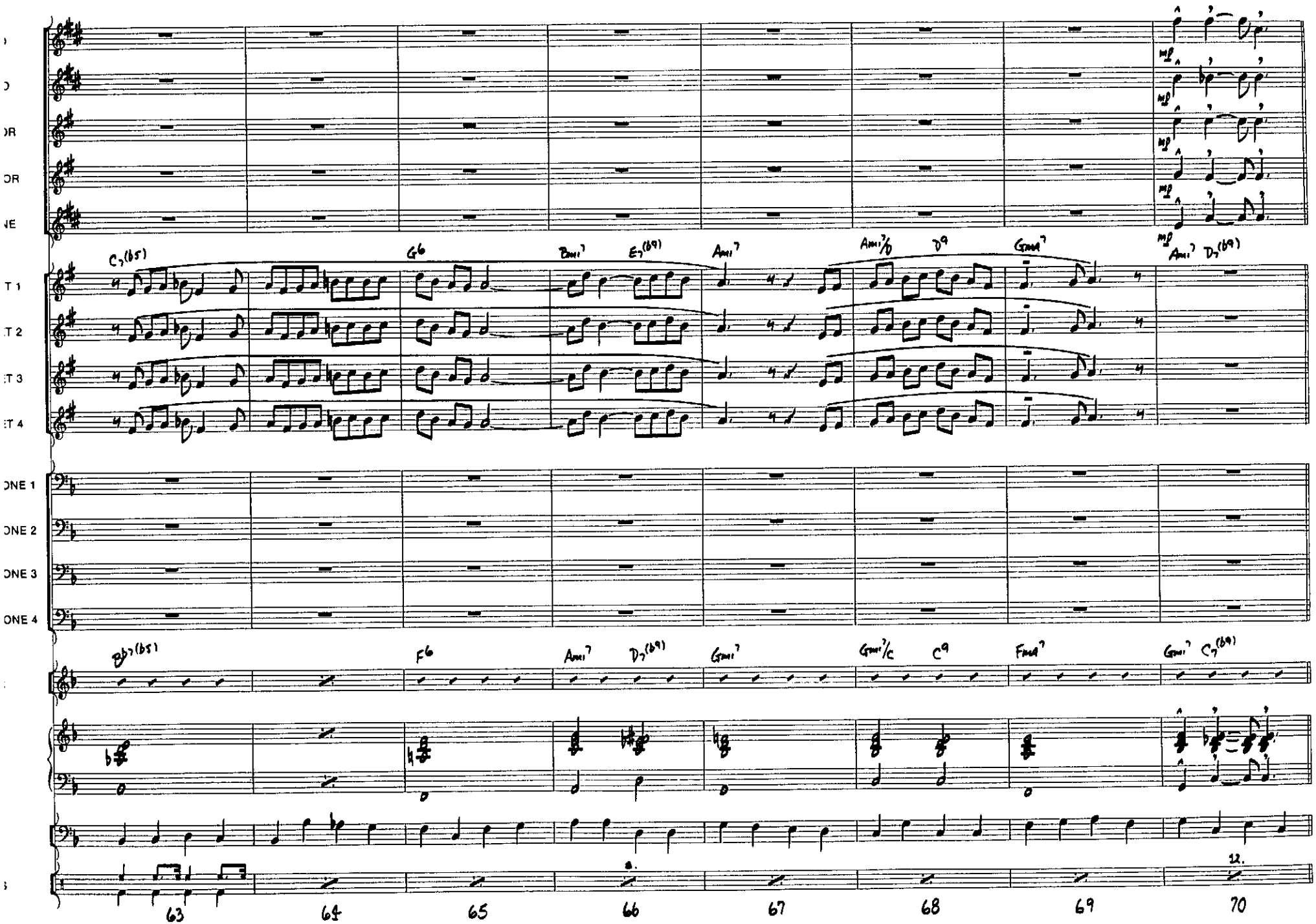

23
(*) BIRD'S RECORDED SOLO (WITH MODIFICATIONS)
SOLI
F6
F9
Cb9(b5)
Bb7
F6
C+7
F6
Am7
D9
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30

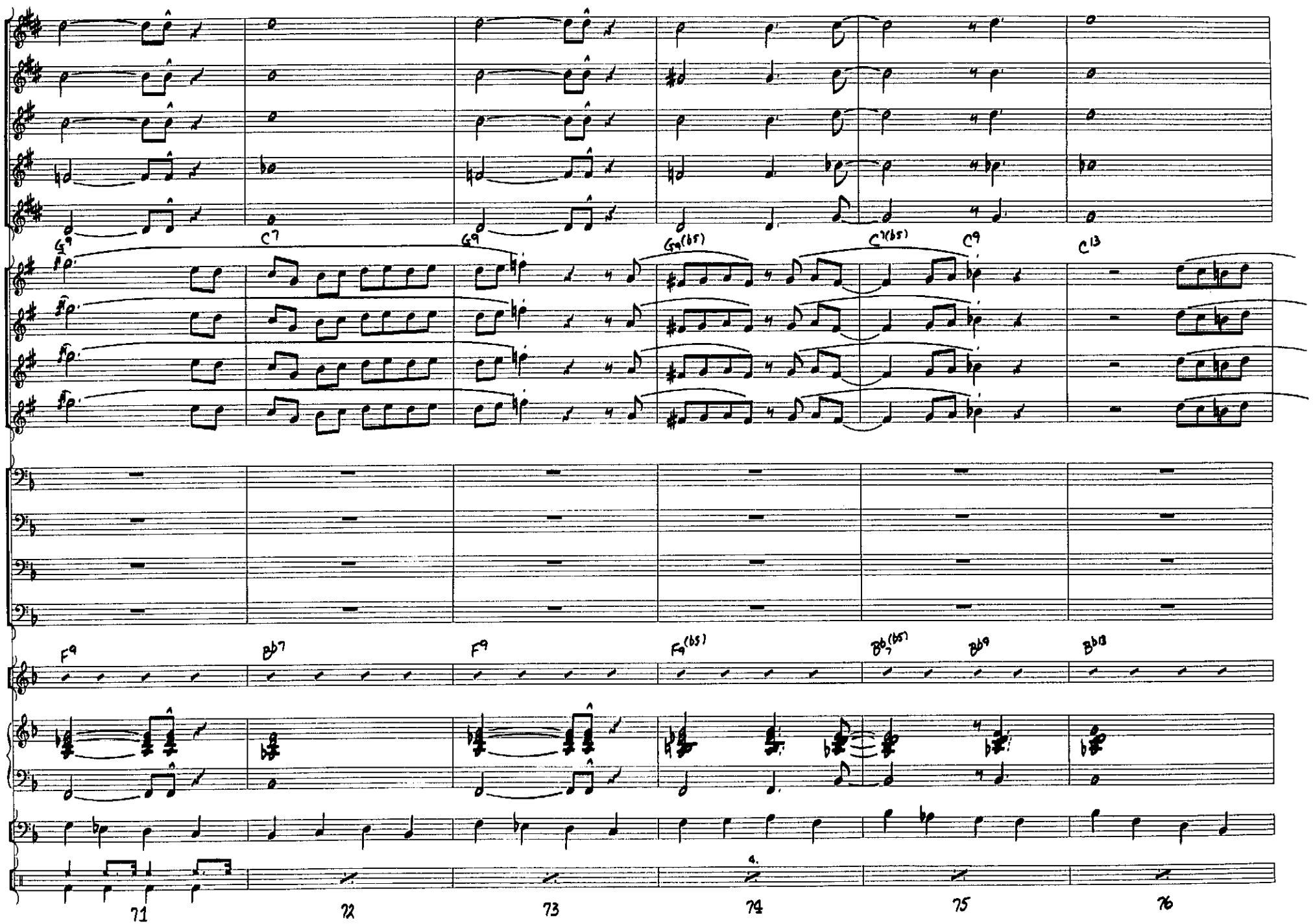

35
R
R
E
1
2
3
4
NE 1
NE 2
NE 3
NE 4
F#mi7 Gmi7
C7(b9)
F6
Gmi7 A/B B♭/C
F6 F/E♭
B♭6/D B°
F6/C
C+7 F9 C♭7(b5)
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

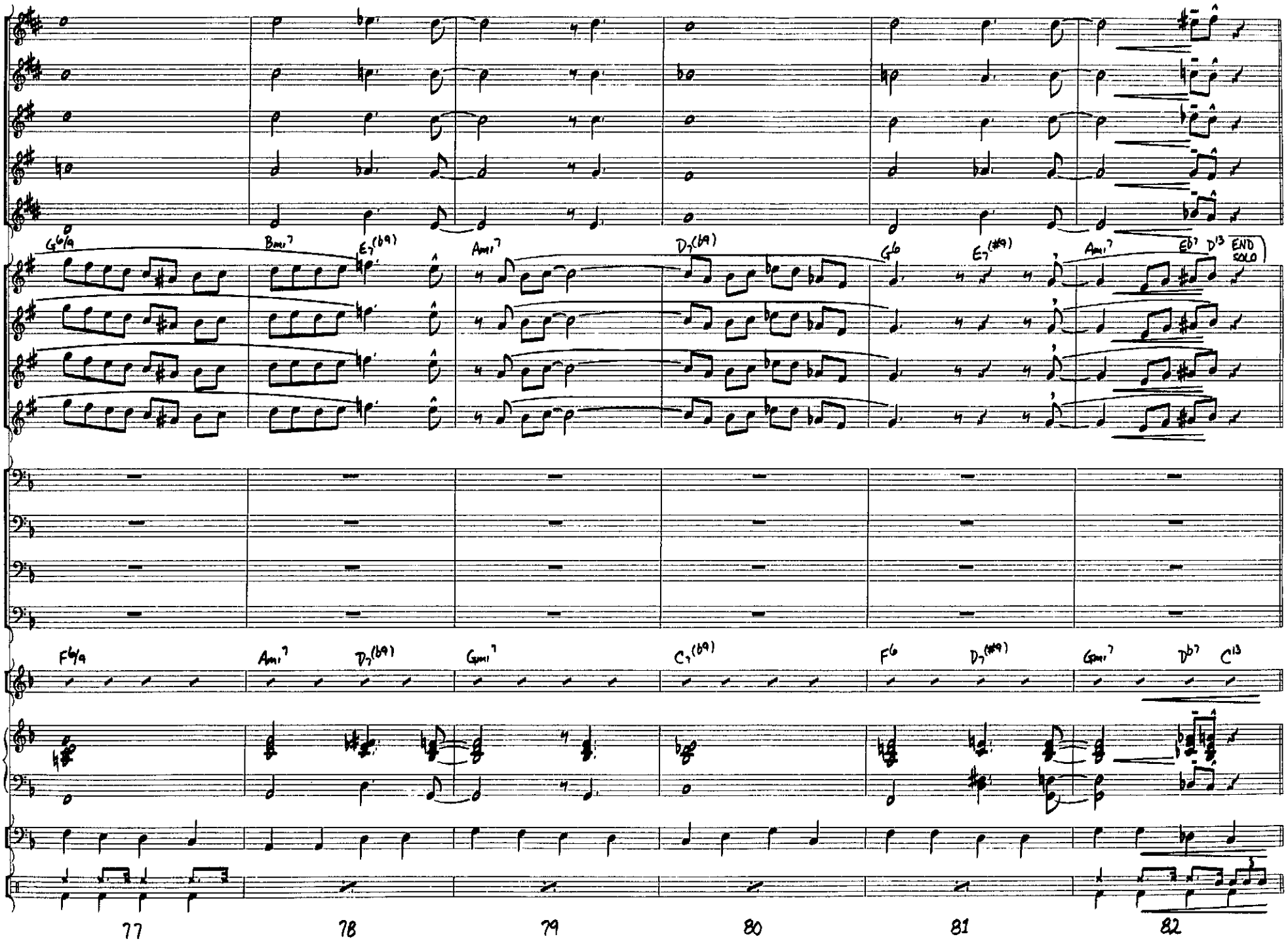

B♭7
B♭7(b5)
Am7
F6/A
Am7
D7
Gm7
C7
F6
Gm7
A♭7(b5)
Gm7
C9
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

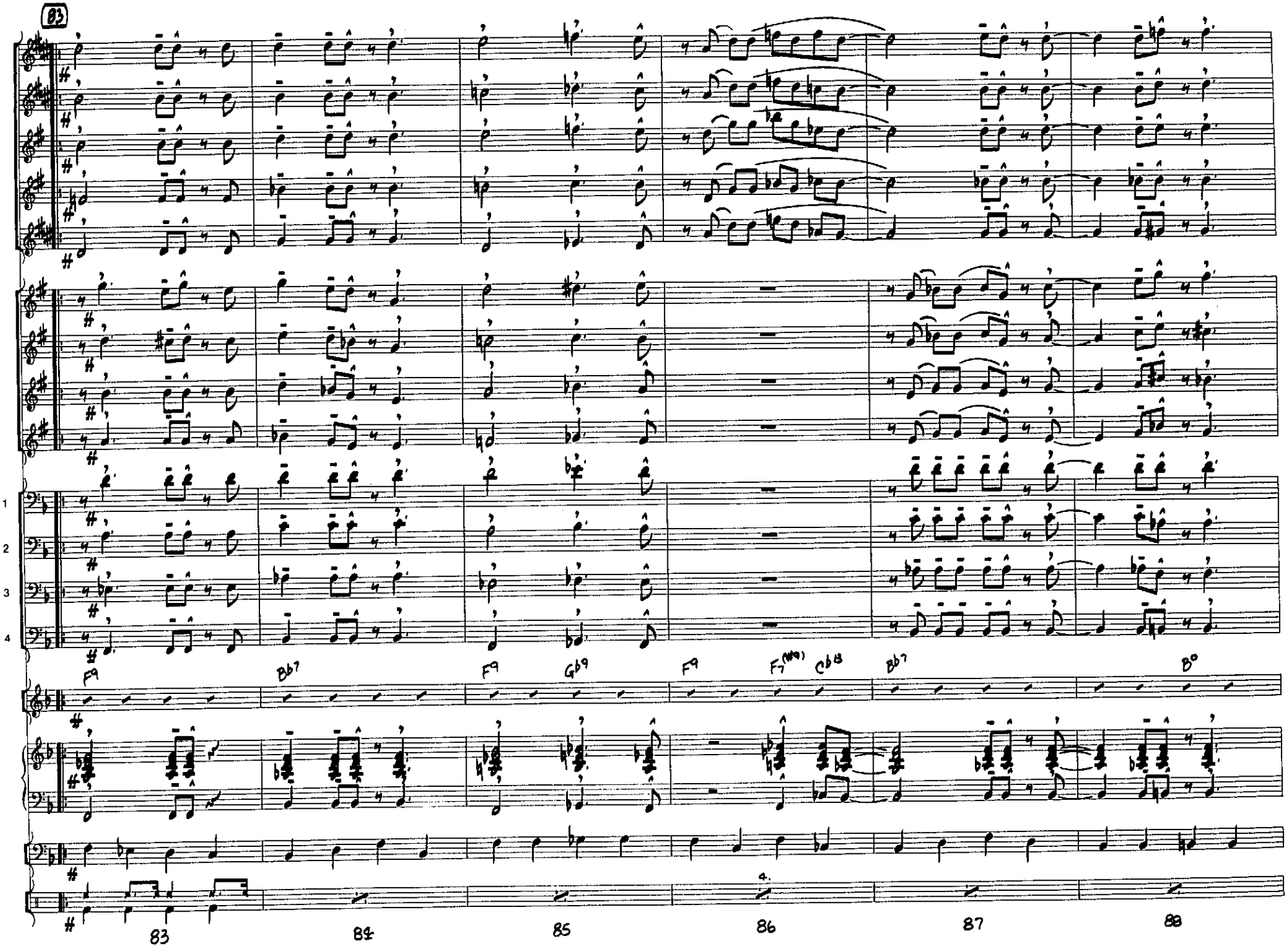

47
1
2
3
4
E 1
IE 2
IE 3
IE 4
F9
B♭7
F9
E9
F9
B♭7
B°
F9/C
Am7
A♭m7
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54

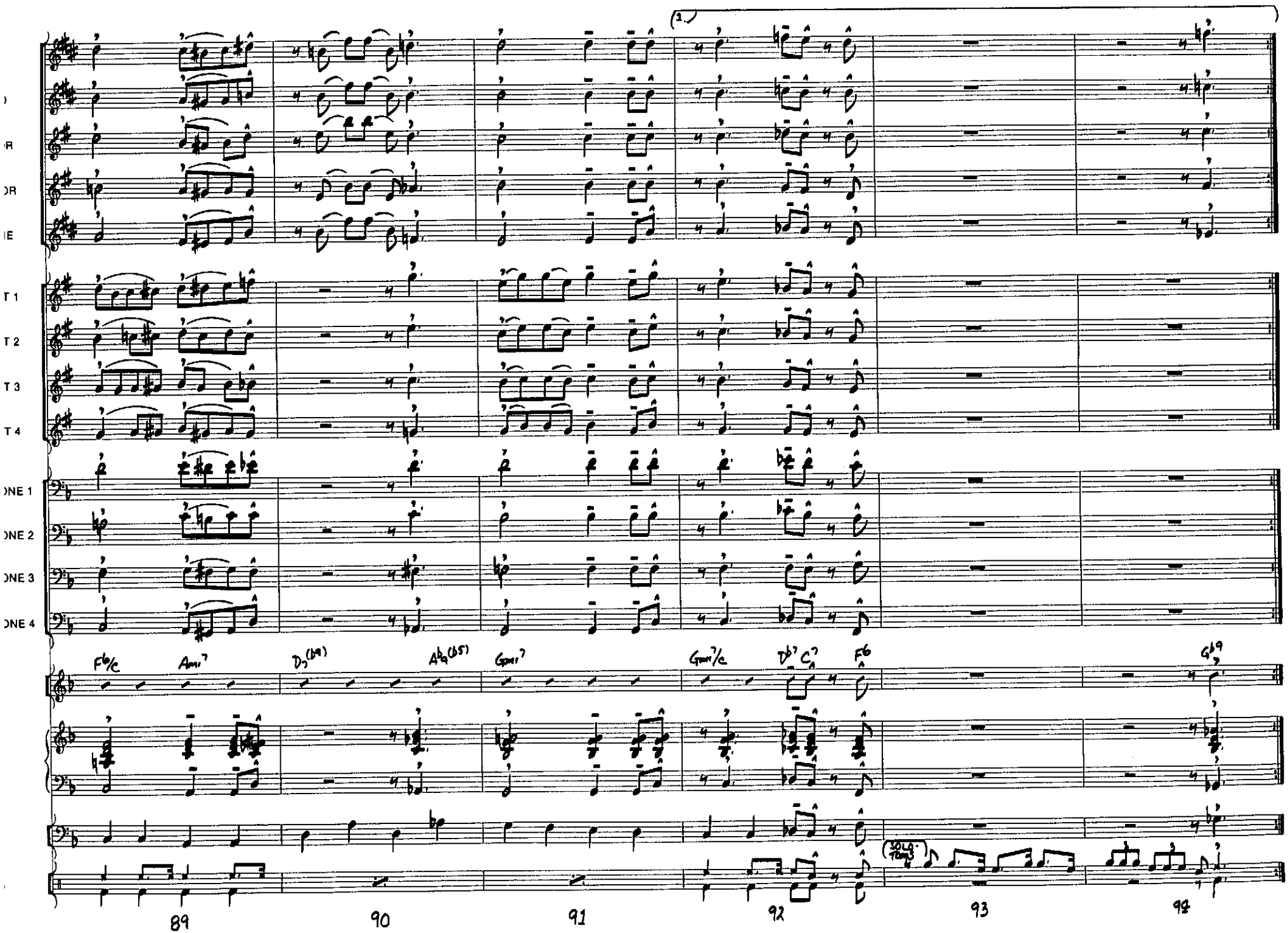

59
(SOLO AD-LIB) (FOR 1 TPT.)
G6 OR UNIS. SOLI
(MILES DAVIS' RECORDED SOLO)
Gmi7
C7(b9)
F6
Gmi7
C7(b9)
F6
Bb13
F9
Cmi7
F9
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62

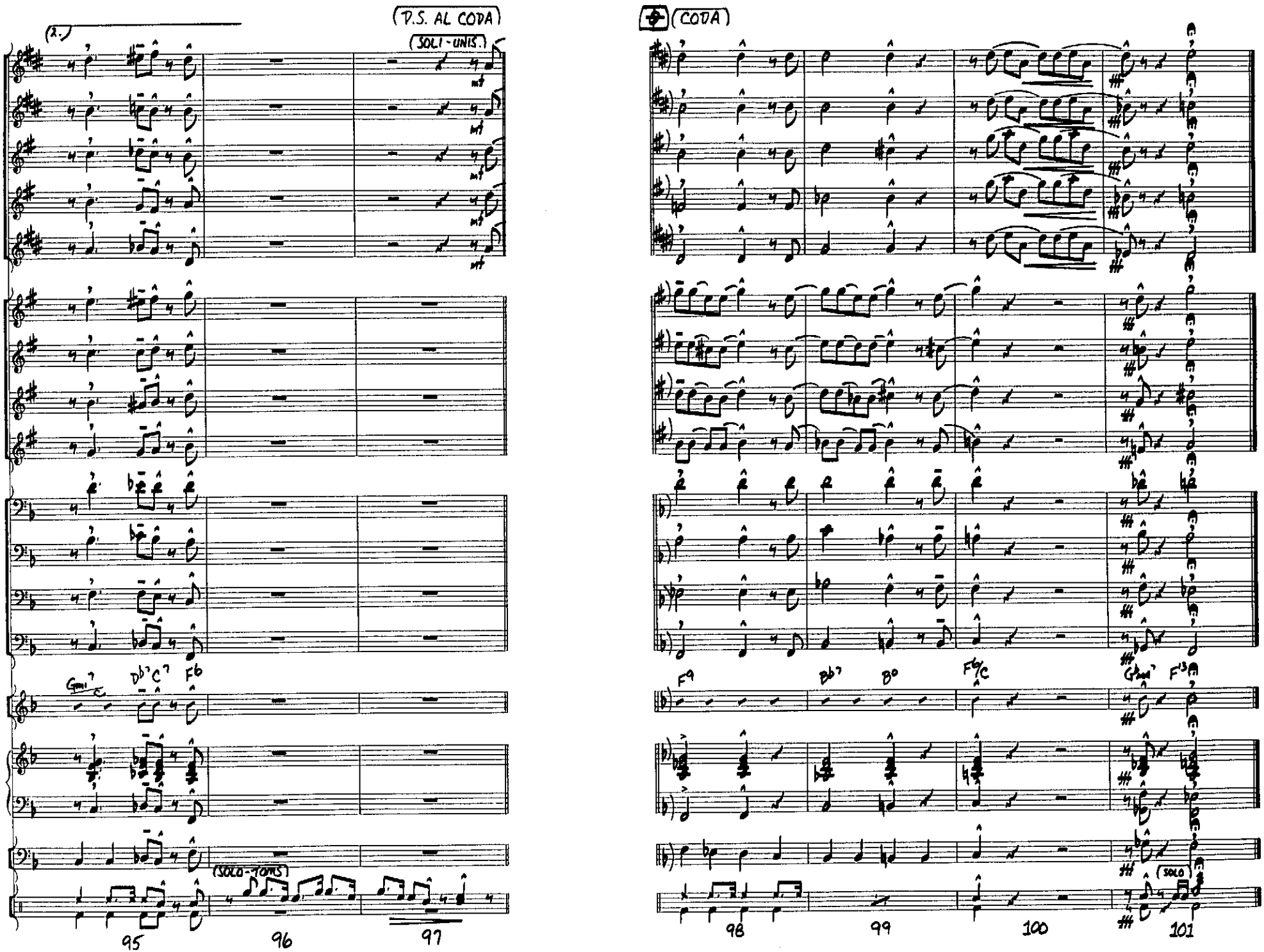

mf
C7(b5)
G6
Bmi7
E7(b9)
Ami7
Ami7/D
D9
GMA7
Ami7
D7(b9)
Bb7(b5)
F6
Ami7
D7(b9)
Gmi7
Gmi7/C
C9
FMA7
Gmi7
C7(b9)
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70


G9
C7
G9
G9(b5)
C7(b5)
C9
C13
F9
Bb7
F9
F9(b5)
Bb7(b5)
Bb9
Bb13
71
72
73
74
75
76


G6/9
Bmi7
E7(b9)
Ami7
D7(b9)
G6
E7(#9)
Ami7
Eb7
D13
END SOLO
F6/9
Ami7
D7(b9)
Gmi7
C7(b9)
F6
D7(#9)
Gmi7
Db7
C13
77
78
79
80
81
82


83
1
2
3
4
F9
B♭7
F9
G♭9
F9
F7(#9)
C♭13
B♭7
B°
83
84
85
86
87
88


(1.)
R
OR
IE
T 1
T 2
T 3
T 4
ONE 1
ONE 2
ONE 3
ONE 4
F6/C
Am7
D7(b9)
Ab9(b5)
Gm7
Gm7/C
Db7
C7
F6
Gb9
(SOLO TIMES)
89
90
91
92
93
94


(2.)
(D.S. AL CODA)
(SOLI-UNIS.)
(SOLO-TOMS)
(CODA)
(SOLO)
95
96
97
98
99
100
101