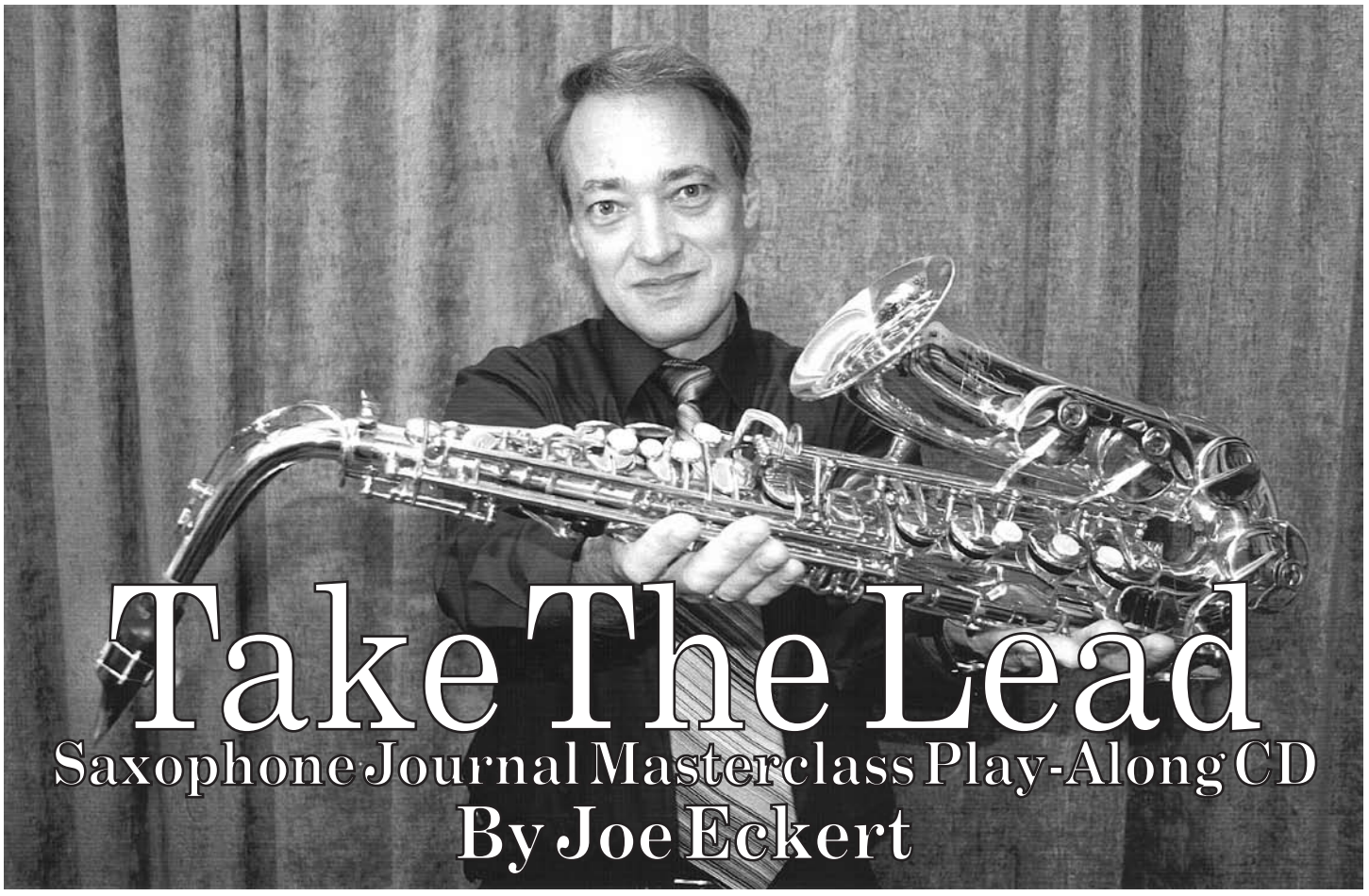


Take The Lead

Saxophone Journal Masterclass Play-Along CD

By Joe Eckert

TAKE THE LEAD
CD Tracks
1.....Introduction
2.....*Licorice* demo
3.....*Licorice* play-along (prep is 4 clicks)
4.....*Four Others* demo
5.....*Four Others* play-along (prep is 8 clicks)
6.....*Impressionable* demo
7.....*Impressionable* play-along (prep is 5 clicks)
8.....*Super* demo
9.....*Super* play-along (rhythm section prep)
10....*A Warm Breeze* demo
11....*A Warm Breeze* play-along (rhythm section prep)

Welcome to this "Take the Lead" masterclass play-along CD for *Saxophone Journal*. It was my great honor to play lead alto with the USAF Band's Airmen of Note from 1984-2004. This masterclass will focus on some of the styles and performance practice that were a part of my daily routine as a professional lead player. You'll hear the complete section on the demo track and then have the opportunity to "take the lead" when the section plays again without the lead part. I hope that this will be a good learning experience and enjoyable for those of you who choose to play along.

ATTRIBUTES OF A LEAD PLAYER

Perhaps the most important attribute of a lead player is consistency. Consistency not only of sound, time, pitch, but also correct style and interpretation is essential for a saxophone section to come together. I often tell my students that it should, "sound like one player is playing five parts." The consistency of a lead player will not only cultivate the confidence of the section but also make it easier for the saxophone section to follow. This is one of the reasons we call the lead chair the "hot seat." It's fun to have the melody but also a great responsibility and a challenge to play with that degree of consistency on a regular basis.

A KNOWLEDGE OF PLAYING STYLES

Knowledge of styles is also an essential element for a lead player to interpret the music accurately. We would obviously not play a "Miller" style tune the same way we play "Supersax." The lead player has some latitude in interpretation as the lead part is really a solo that is harmonized, but you must remember that you can't over stylize and expect the section to follow you. For this reason, the most stylized solis (in the style of Glenn Miller or Count Basie) are usually the most difficult to perform.

For this particular masterclass I've chosen five different lead styles to demonstrate how they should be played and sound. These are in no way all-inclusive, just a representation of five different approaches of taking the lead in a saxophone section. One performance note: I've left out most of the articulations except for those written into the part on *A Warm Breeze*. I would prefer that you listen and then imitate what you've heard in the complete version.

GLENN MILLER CLARINET LEAD STYLE

Licorice

Most jazz oriented saxophonists are keenly aware that they must also be good doublers to make a living these days. The role of the lead alto player is no different as demonstrated by

Licorice performed on track 2 (play-along is track 3). The distinctive Glenn Miller sound is characterized by clarinet lead over a sax section consisting of clarinet, two altos and two tenors. The example you'll hear and then play is voiced in close harmony with the 2nd tenor doubling the lead clarinet. You'll also notice that vibrato is used by the entire section, matching the width and intensity of the lead clarinet. When playing clarinet in this style, it would be advisable to use a bit more open mouthpiece and perhaps a softer reed to enable you to achieve a better, more relaxed balance with the saxophones in the section. The articulation style is usually legato and phrasing should be consistent from part to part.

WOODY HERMAN FOUR BROTHERS
TENOR LEAD STYLE
Four Others

On track 4 is a complete performance of a tune I call *Four Others* (the play-along version is on track 5), and is characteristic of the famous "Four Brothers" sound which was of course one of the hallmarks of the Woody Herman Orchestra. The "Four Brothers" section consisted of three tenors and one bari with Woody occasionally playing clarinet or alto solos over the band. This style emerged with Woody's "First Herd" in 1946 and has been a popular sound ever since. You'll notice that the style of the section is a little more of the "cool school," with less vibrato used throughout. Since the harmony is four parts instead of five, you won't hear the usual doubling of the lead in the lower octave by the bari or low tenor part.

BUD SHANK AND THE SAX SECTION STYLE
Impressionable

One of my favorite albums to listen to from the late 1960s was, and continues to be, *Bud Shank and the Sax Section*. It featured, of course, Bud Shank with some of the great West coast players of the 60s, and fabulous arrangements by Bob Florence. The format followed featured Bud in a sort of solo, or melodic role, accompanied by the other saxophonists. After the statement of the original theme, a harmonized sax soli in the style of "Supersax" followed, and then Bud would "take it out" with a restatement of the original theme. I would highly recommend you listen to this recording titled *Bud Shank and the Sax Section*, if you've never heard it before. The complete performance of *Impressionable* is on track 6 (the play-along is track 7). My *Impressionable* loosely follows the same format Bud Shank used, with a piano solo inserted between the soli and the restatement of the theme. The melody is played in more of a solo style, while the lead part in the soli is played in a fairly traditional bop, post bop style. You'll hear the traditional lead doubled by the bari, and also some "drop 2" and other voicings in this style.

SUPERSAX STYLE
Super

Supersax took the sax soli concept to newer heights by taking the improvised solos of Charlie Parker and harmonizing them for the complete sax section (AATTB). My example is in no way exemplary of Charlie Parker's genius, but does touch on the bop style he and Dizzy Gillespie made famous.

After one chorus of introduction by the rhythm section my complete recording on track 8 of *Super* begins with a unison line for the first chorus (the play-along is on track 9). The melody is harmonized the second time through and a harmonized solo ensues. The ensemble "trades 4's" with the drummer and then goes back to the original theme to finish off this example. Once again there is traditional octave doubling and some drop two and more "spread" voicings highlighted in this example.

COUNT BASIE STYLE
A Warm Breeze

Along with my mentor, at the University of North Texas, Jim Riggs, Marshall Royal was definitely one of the biggest influences on my concept of lead alto playing. As the lead altoist with the Count Basie Orchestra for many years, Royal defined the "classic" lead alto sound, which in my opinion, every player today should try to learn and emulate. I'm forever grateful to my good friend Sammy Nestico for giving me permission to adapt his classic composition written for the Basie Orchestra, titled *A Warm Breeze,* to demonstrate this style. A complete performance of A Warm Breeze is on track 10 and the play-along version is on track 11.

I can think of no better saxophone soli written in this style. An added bonus, which I've included, is the ensemble section towards the end of the tune which features flute lead over the ensemble. This lead style (made popular by the incomparable Frank Wess) is also indicative of the distinctive Basie sound. For those of you who may not double on flute (yet), you can transpose the section written for flute and play it on alto.

PLAYING LEAD IN A BIG BAND

Playing lead in a big band has definitely been one of the most fulfilling musical experiences I've enjoyed over the course of my professional career. Having to play all of the section parts on this recording has reaffirmed my respect for the guys who supported me for all those years. I hope you've enjoyed this brief introduction to lead playing and invite you to write or e-mail me if you have any questions or comments about this masterclass. My thanks again to *Saxophone Journal* for interest in this topic.

JOE ECKERT is currently Associate Professor of Saxophone and Director of Jazz Studies at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Virginia. He recently retired from a 20-year career as lead alto saxophonist woodwind specialist and director for the USAF Band's Airmen of Note in Washington, D.C. Mr. Eckert received his B.M. from Baldwin-Wallace College and went on to complete graduate and post-graduate studies at the University of North Texas, where he was a member of the world renowned One O'clock Lab Band. Prior to joining the Airmen of Note, he was Assistant Professor of Saxophone and Director of Jazz Studies at West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia (1981-84), where his ensembles were awarded for their excellence and he received the "Outstanding Teacher Award" for 1982-83.

While with the "Note" he toured extensively across North and South America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. He had performed with some of the great named in jazz, including Louis Bellson, The Brecker Brothers, Bob Mintzer, Peter Erskine, Jimmy Heath, J.J. Johnson, Cleo Laine, Mike Mainieri, Carmen McRae, Clark Terry, Kenny Werner, Paquito D'Rivera, Joe Williams and many others. Some of his freelance activities include performances with the Dallas Symphony, the Fort Worth Symphony, and the National Symphony

Orchestra and tours with Liza Minnelli and Nelson Riddle.

Comfortable in both jazz and classical idioms, he is the only member of the faculty at Shenandoah to have been a guest soloist with the Symphony Orchestra, Wind Ensemble, Jazz Ensemble and Brass Quintet. After serving as adjunct faculty since 1987, Joe joined the faculty full-time upon his retirement from active duty in the fall of 2004. He has served as an adjudicator and clinician at music festivals, high schools, and colleges nationally and internationally. Mr. Eckert is currently an educational specialist for the Conn-Selmer Corporation and is President-Elect of the Virginia Chapter of IAJE. §

Joe Eckert, Professor of Saxophone
Director of Jazz Studies
Shenandoah University
Winchester, VA 22601
(540) 665-5565
jeckert@su.edu

SUPPORTING MUSICIANS ON THIS CD

Bob Larson, piano
Golder O'Neill, bass
Alphonso Young, drums
Engineer: Todd Campbell
Photos: Cathy Kuehner
Recorded at Shenandoah University Studios October 1, 2005

JOE ECKERT'S EQUIPMENT

• Clarinet
Buffet R-13 with Ralph Morgan J-6 mouthpiece and Vandoren #3 reeds
• Alto Sax
Conn 25-M with Charles Bay #10 "jazz" mouthpiece and Rico Jazz Select #3 Soft (filed) reeds
• Tenor Sax
Martin Committee Model with Berg Larsen 105/0 mouthpiece customized by Ralph Morgan and Vandoren #3 Java reeds
• Bari Sax
Selmer Mark VI with Berg Larsen 100/0 mouthpiece and Vandoren #3 Java reeds
• Flute
Gemeinhart 3SS B-foot (solid silver open hole)

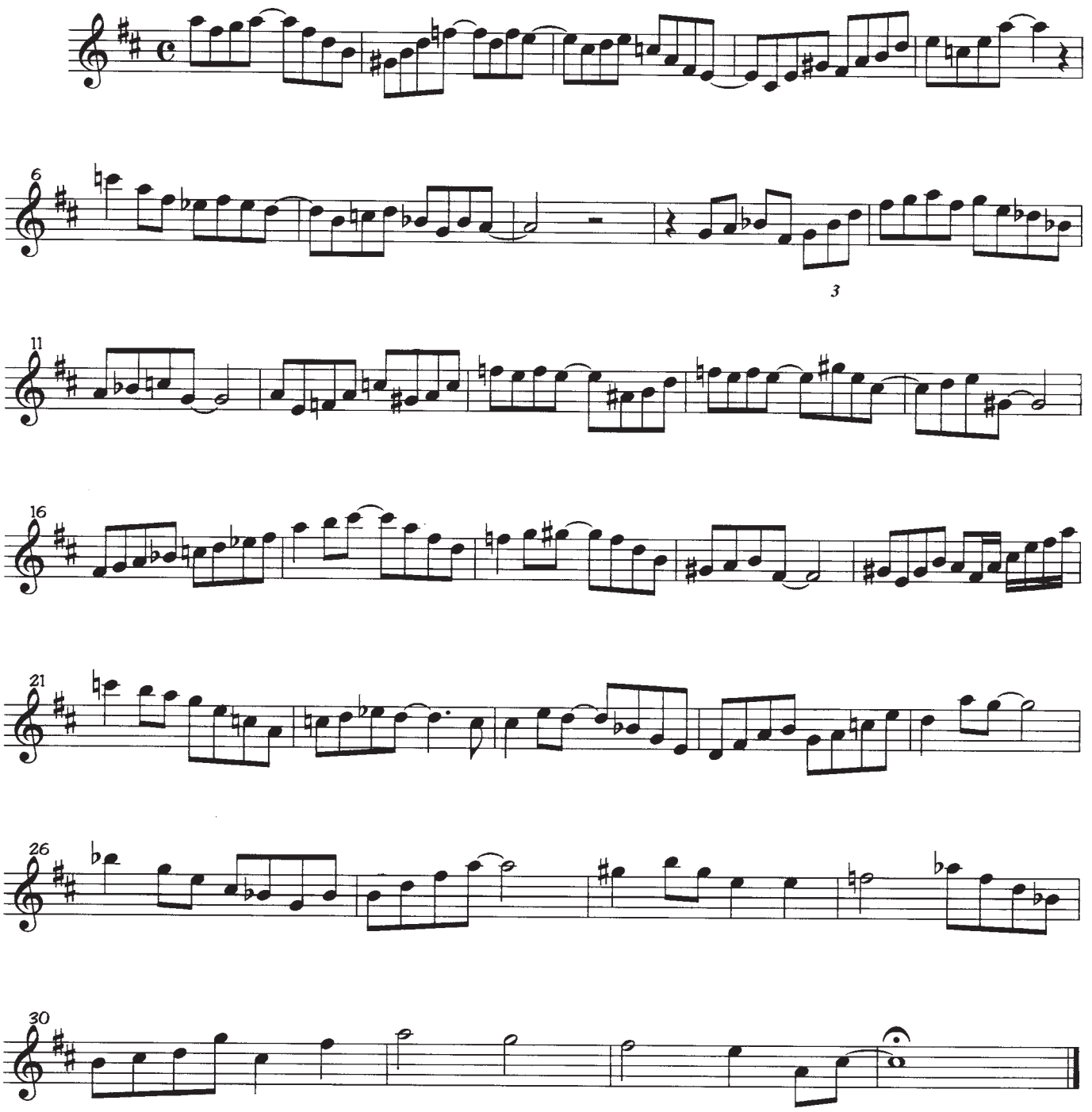
Licorice

(Clarinet Lead)

Track 2 *Licorice* demo
Track 3 *Licorice* play-along

Joe Eckert

Swing q = 96



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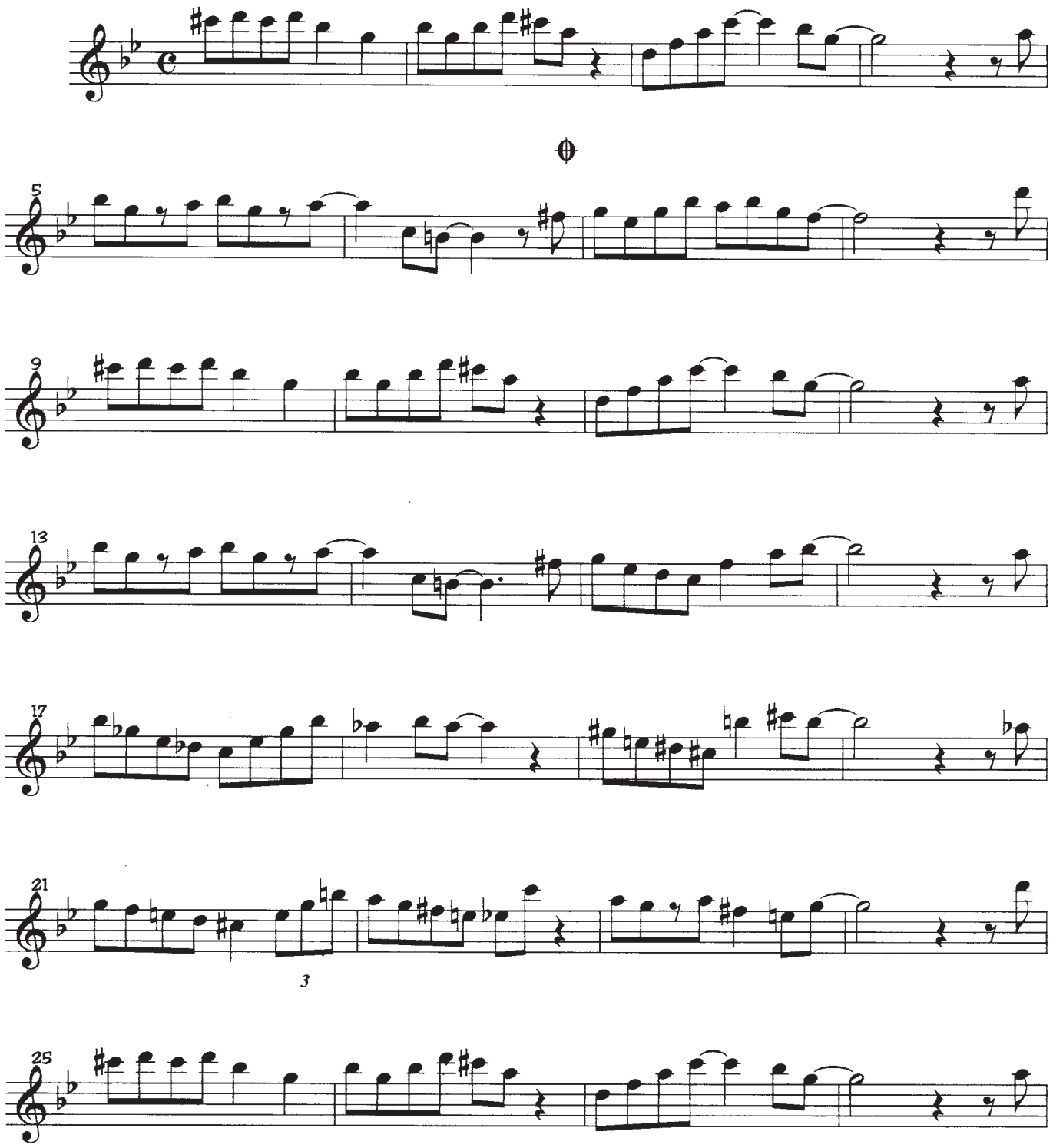
Four Others

(Tenor Lead)

Track 4 *Four Others* demo
Track 5 *Four Others* play-along

Joe Eckert

Fast Swing q = 200



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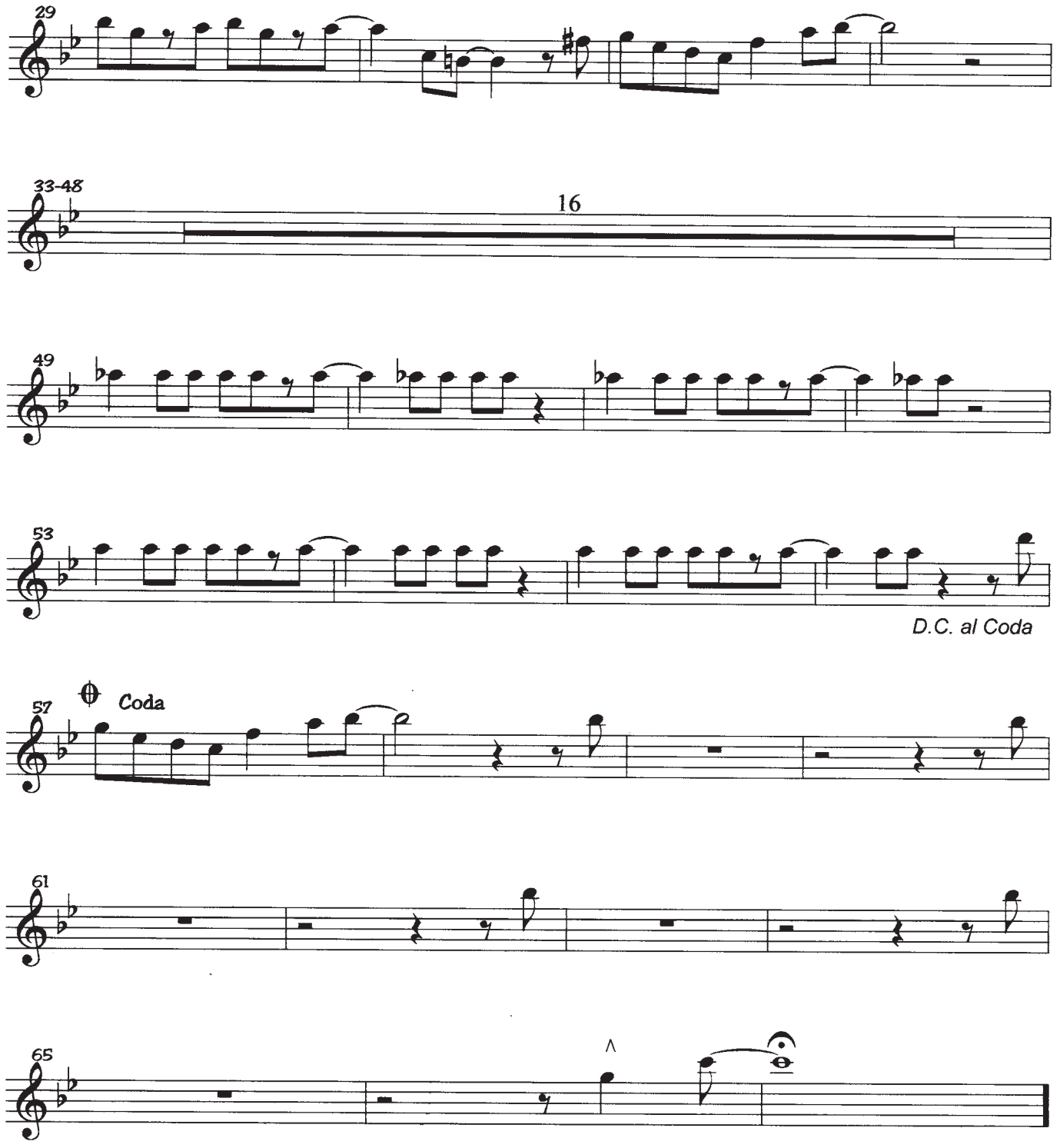

29
33-48
16
49
53
D.C. al Coda
57
Coda
61
65

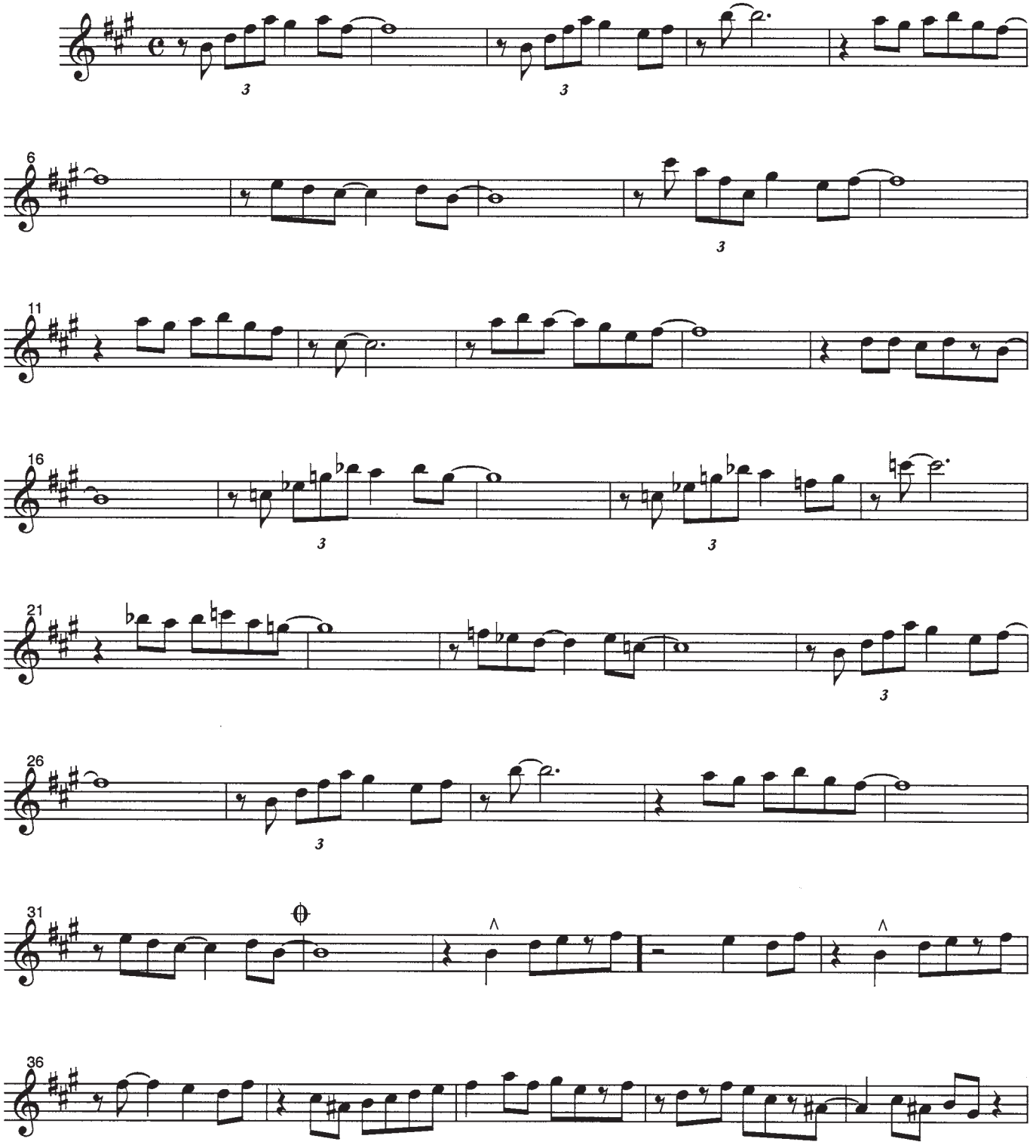
Impressionable

(Alto Lead)

Track 6 *Impressionable* demo
Track 7 *Impressionable* play-along

Joe Eckert

Swing q = 160



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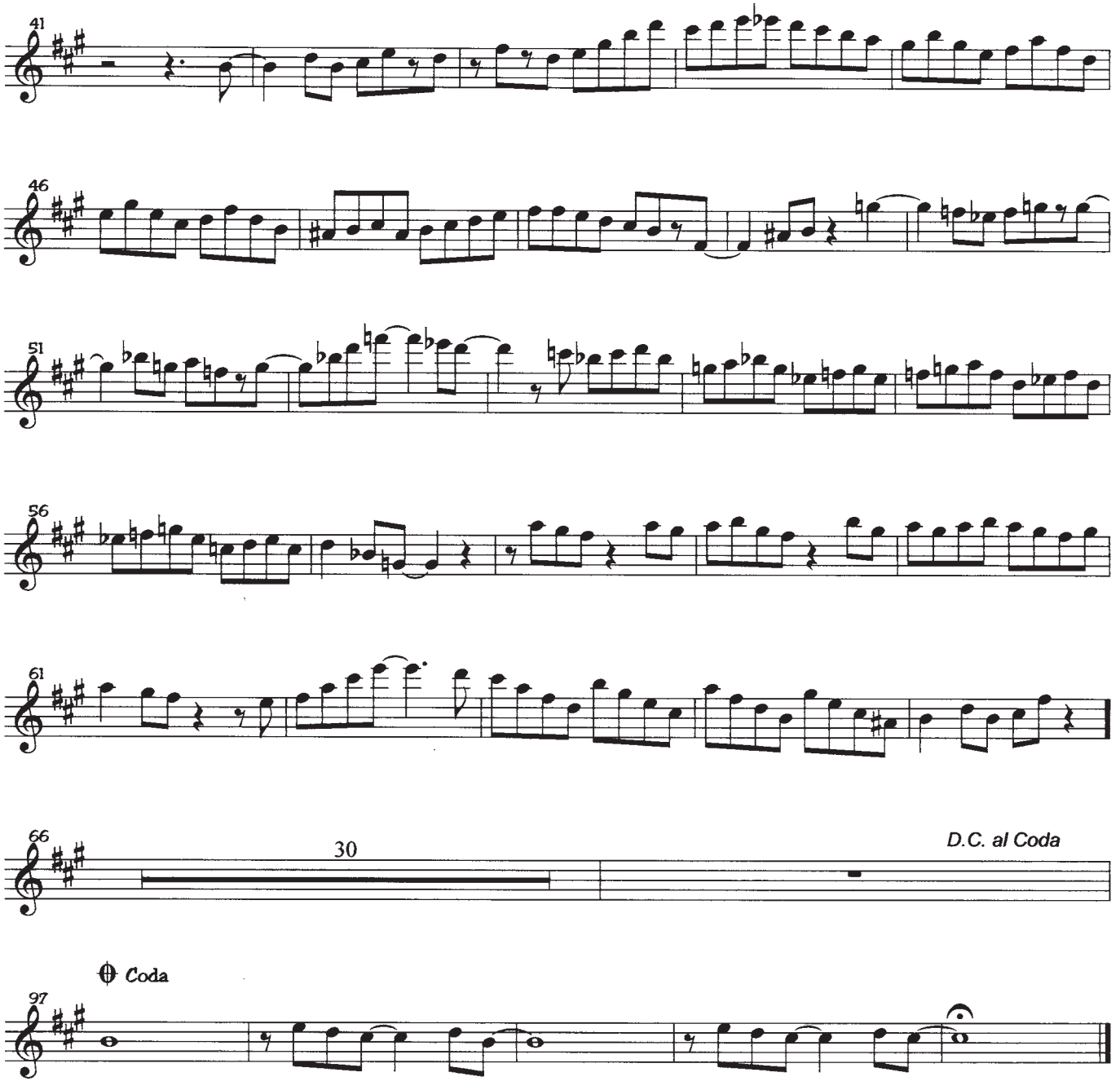
Impressionable cont'd

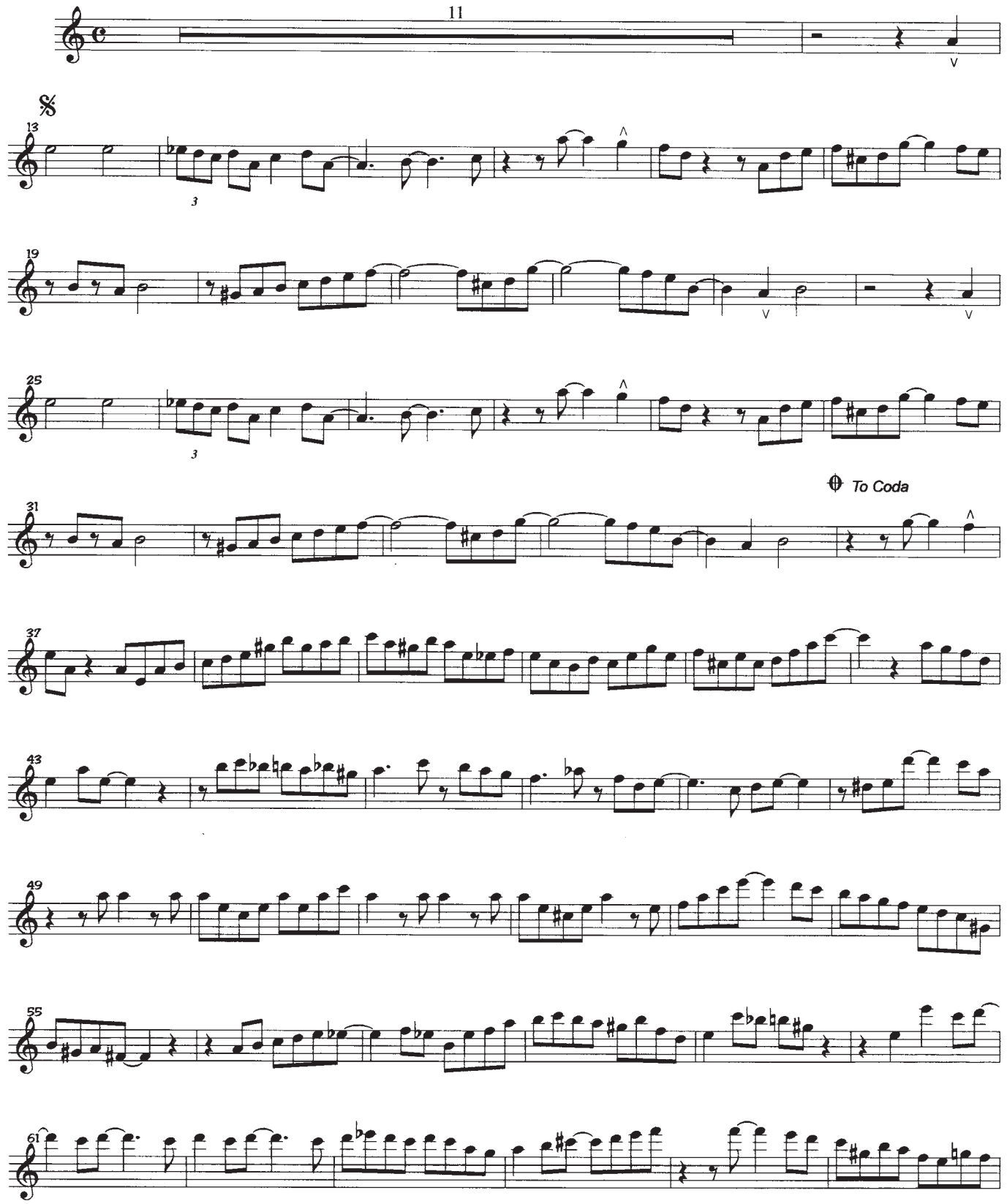


Super
(Alto Lead)

Track 8 *Super* demo
Track 9 *Super* play-along

Fast Swing q = 212

Joe Eckert



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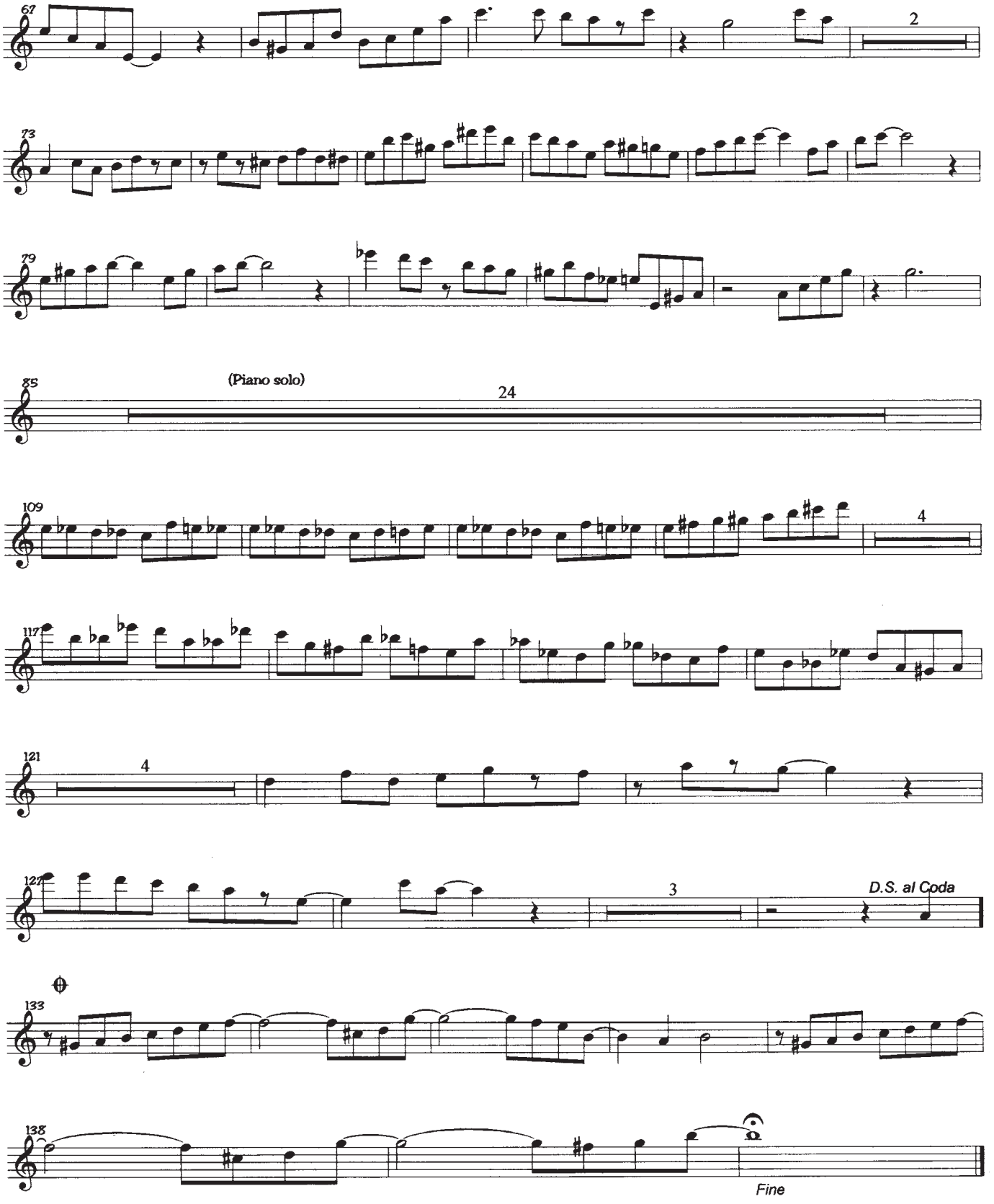
Super cont'd


67
2
73
79
85
(Piano solo)
24
109
4
117
121
4
127
3
D.S. al Coda
133
138
Fine

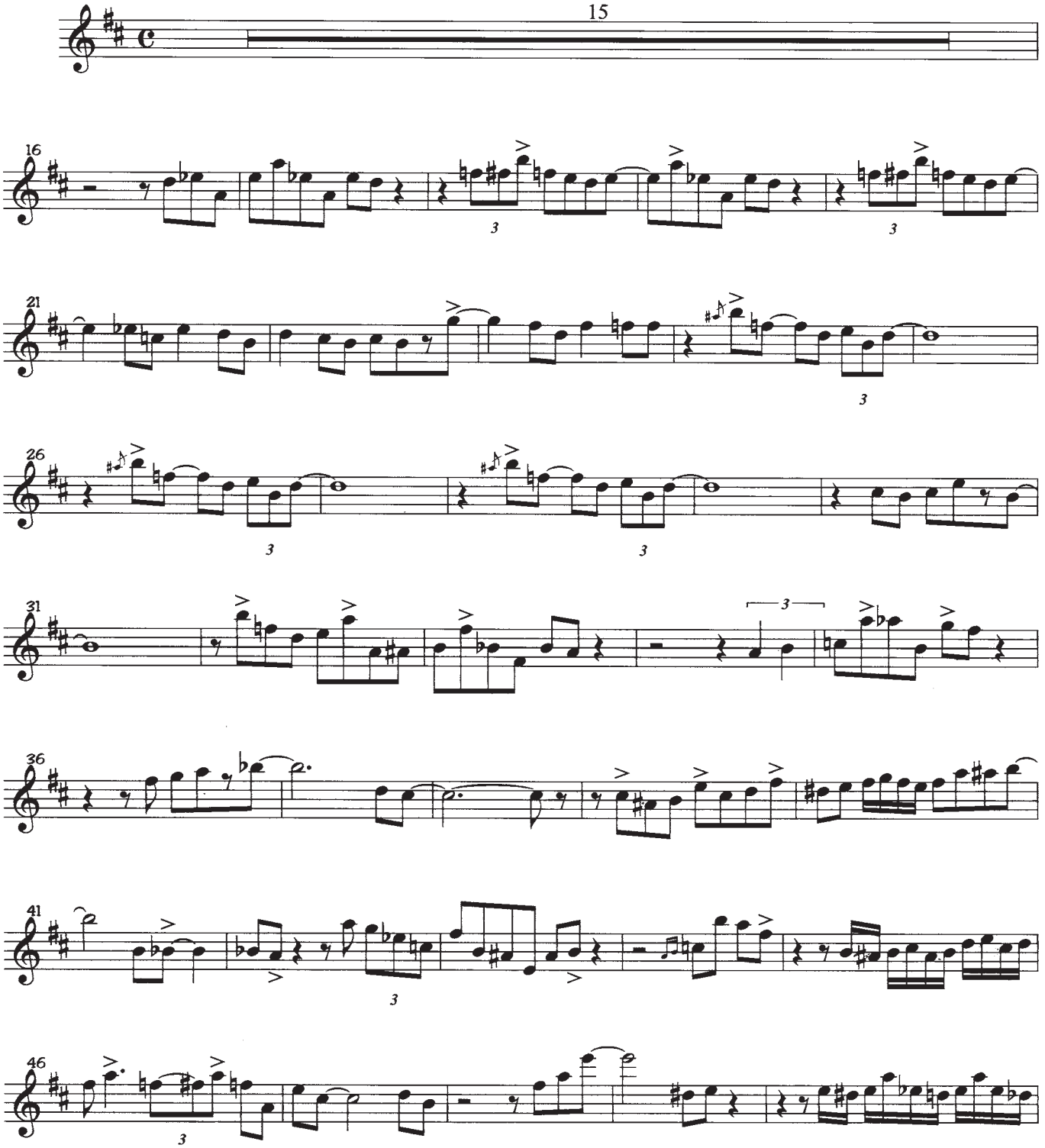
A Warm Breeze

Track 10 *A Warm Breeze* demo
Track 11 *A Warm Breeze* play-along

(Alto Lead)

Laid Back Swing q = 116

Sammy Nestico



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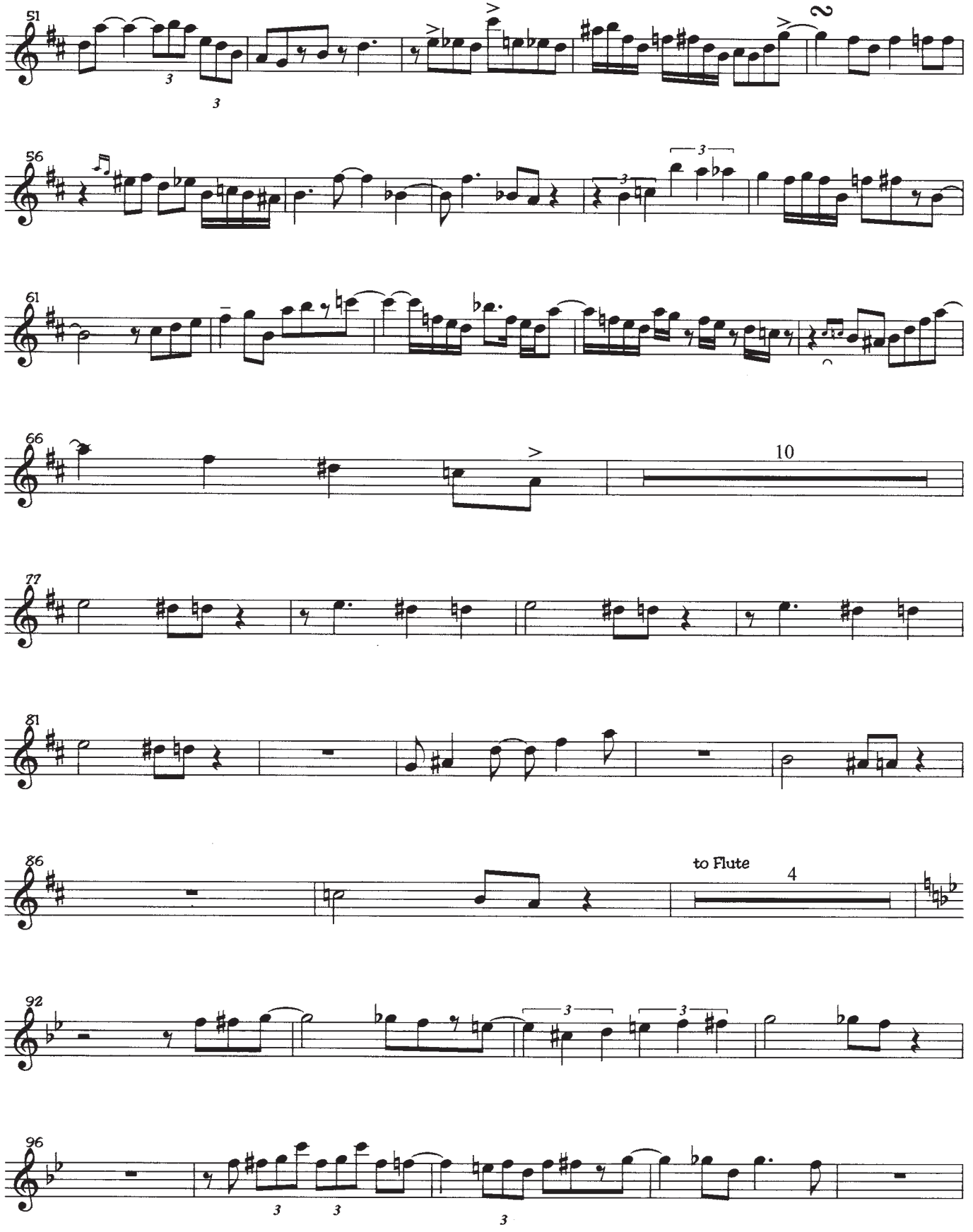
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86
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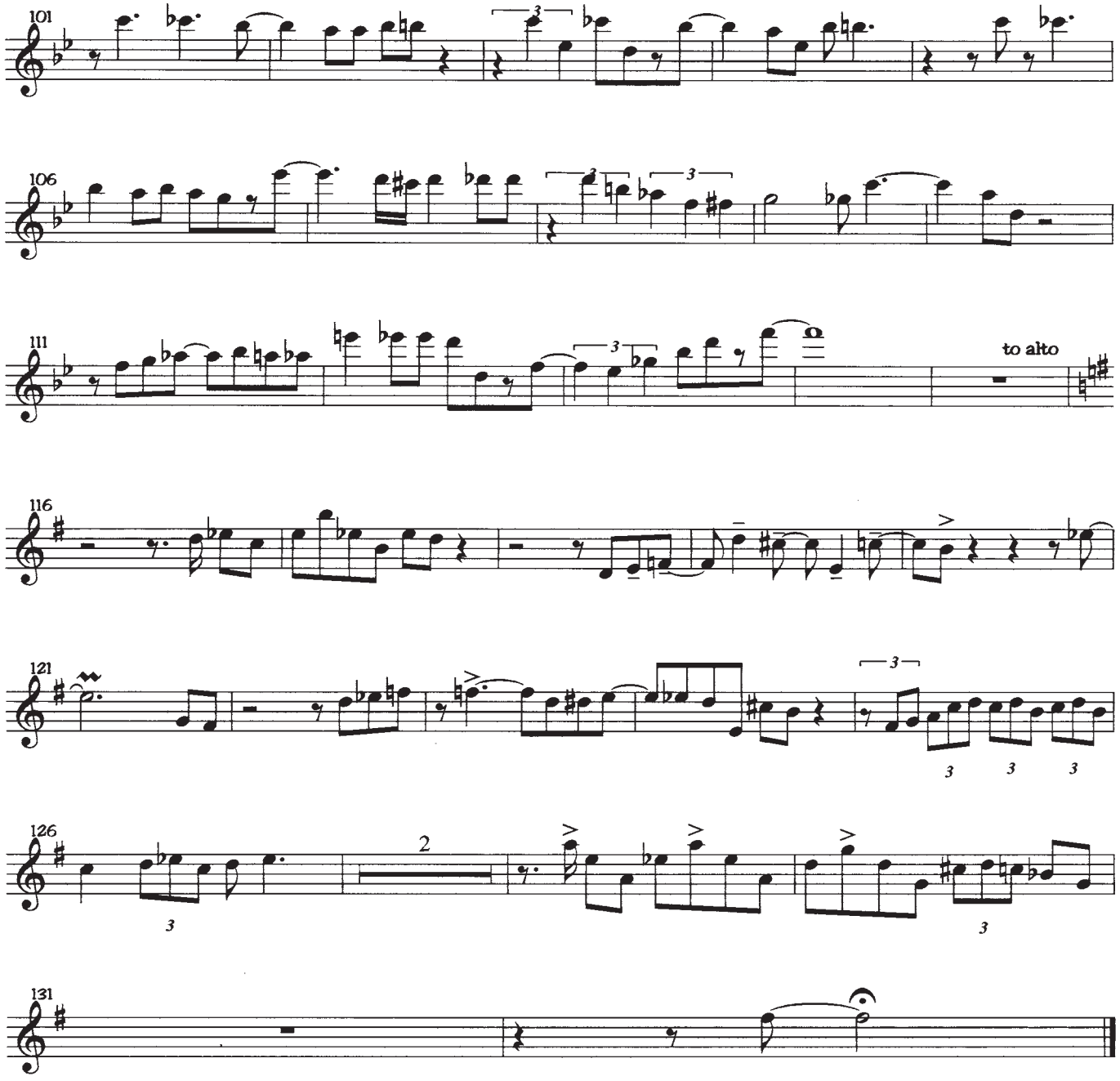
4
92
96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