"Flashes"

Introduction

"Flashes" is an instrumental piece written for piano by Bix Beiderbecke in 1931. It appeared in print in his *Modern Piano Suite* publication along with three other pieces. In the late 1970's Joseph Byrd was preparing to record "Jazz," an album dedicated to period pieces, which included three pieces written by Beiderbecke. Byrd approached Ted Greene to ask him help out with the chord arrangements on these three tunes, which would be played on guitar by Ry Cooder.

What follows is a transcription of that studio recording. But it's more than just a transcription – it encompasses Ted's arrangement, or more accurately, his guitar adaptation of Byrd's arrangement. The transcription was brilliantly done by Nick Stasinos, and it includes standard notation and TAB. Ted Greene-style chord diagrams were later added by Paul Vachon. Nick also includes Byrd's arrangement "sketch" or "session chart" that he gave to Ted to work with.

Nick was a long-time student of Ted's, and they had spent a few lessons over the years going over parts of "Flashes." At the end of this file Nick shares some history, valuable comments, and measure-by-measure "performance notes" for playing the tune. These are important, as they contain some insights to Ted's thinking for this arrangement.

To hear this recording, find it on YouTube here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3l5Ubp-PKlk
Be sure to tune your guitar down a half-step if you want to play along with the recording.

There's also a video of a live 1978 "Soundstage" performance of Ry playing "Flashes." It contains some variations that are not on the transcription (and are noted in Nick's performance notes).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmj2NuO5UO4 (starting at 3:42)

Enjoy!

Playing order: ● × □ △
○ = opt.

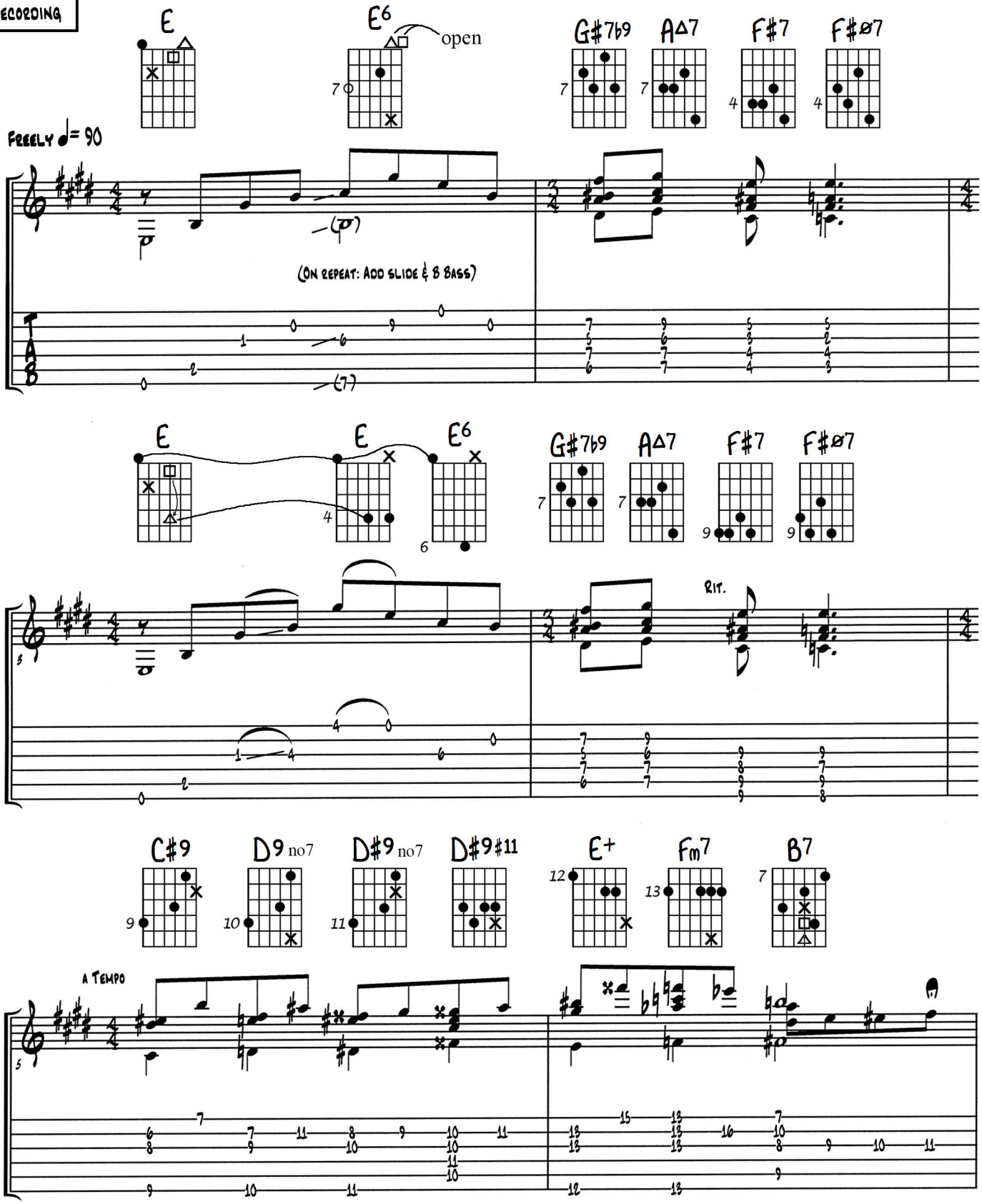
FLASHES

(As played by Ry Cooder on "Jazz")

Bix Beiderbecke
Arr. Joseph Byrd & Ted Greene

Archtop Guitar

Tune down ½ step to match recording



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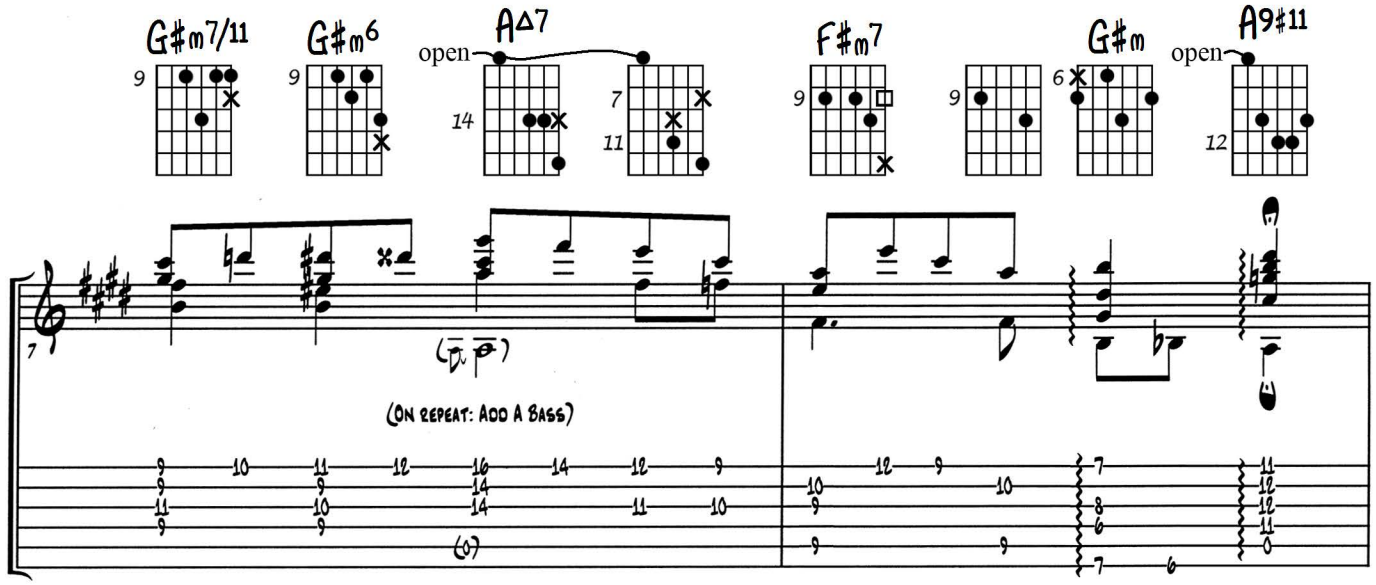
Transcribed & Engraved By Nick Stasinos
Stazz Music Productions

"FLASHES" P.2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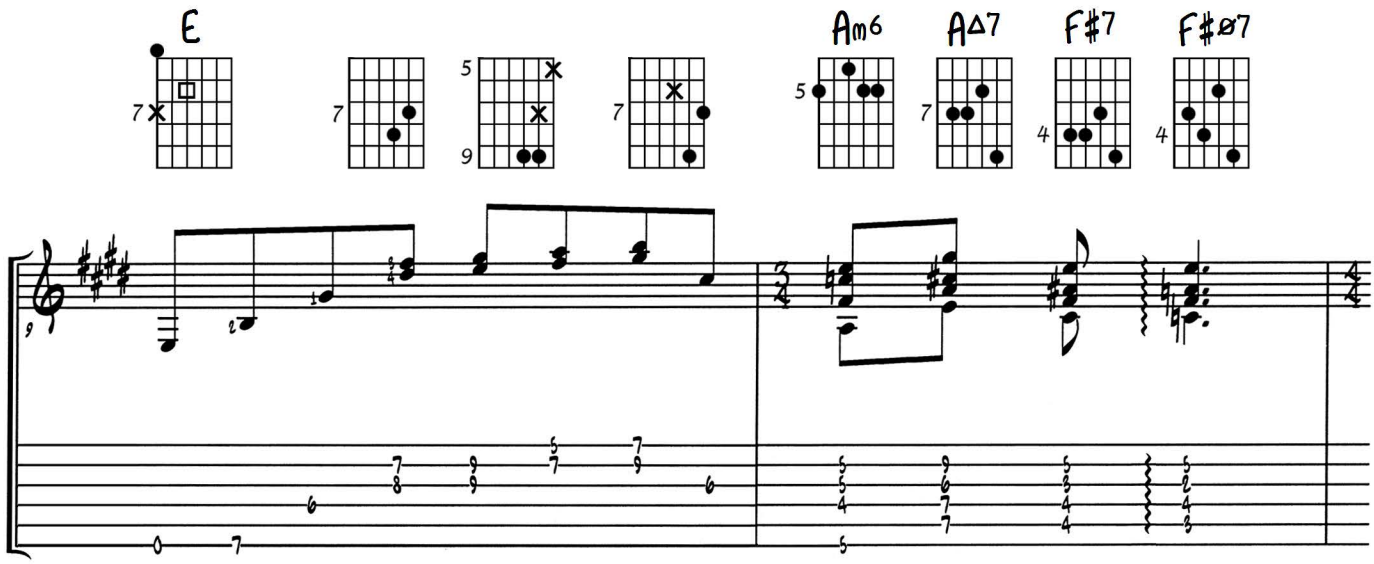
A△7
open
F♯m7
G♯m
A9♯11
open
(On repeat: Add A Bass)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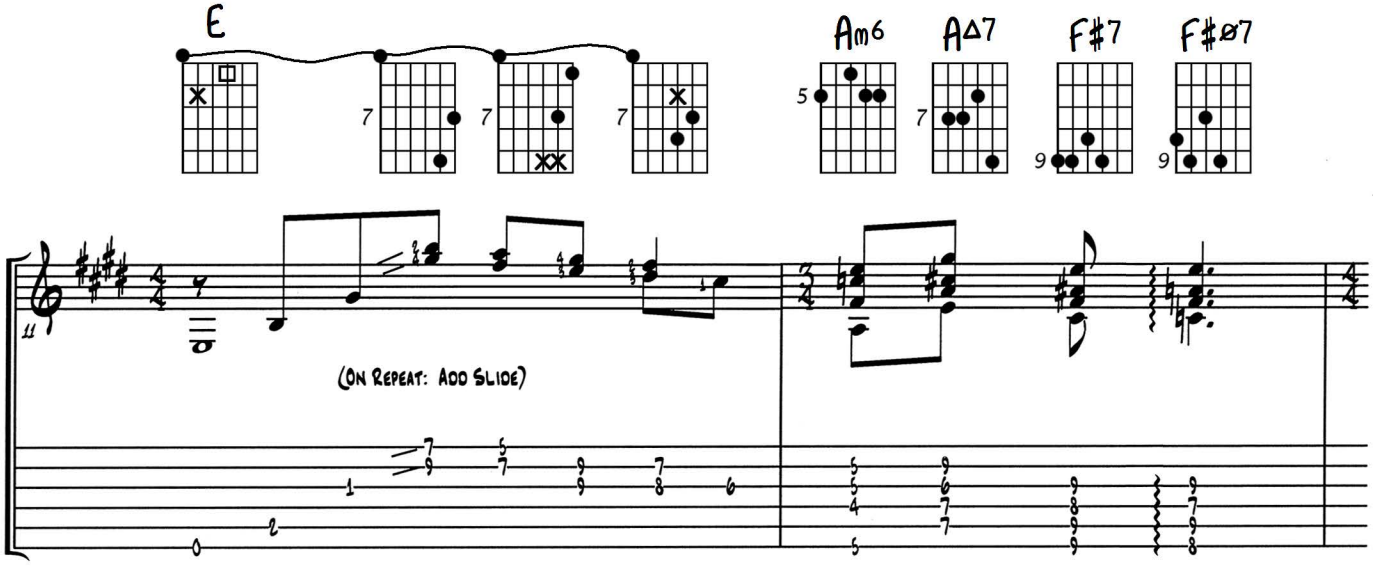
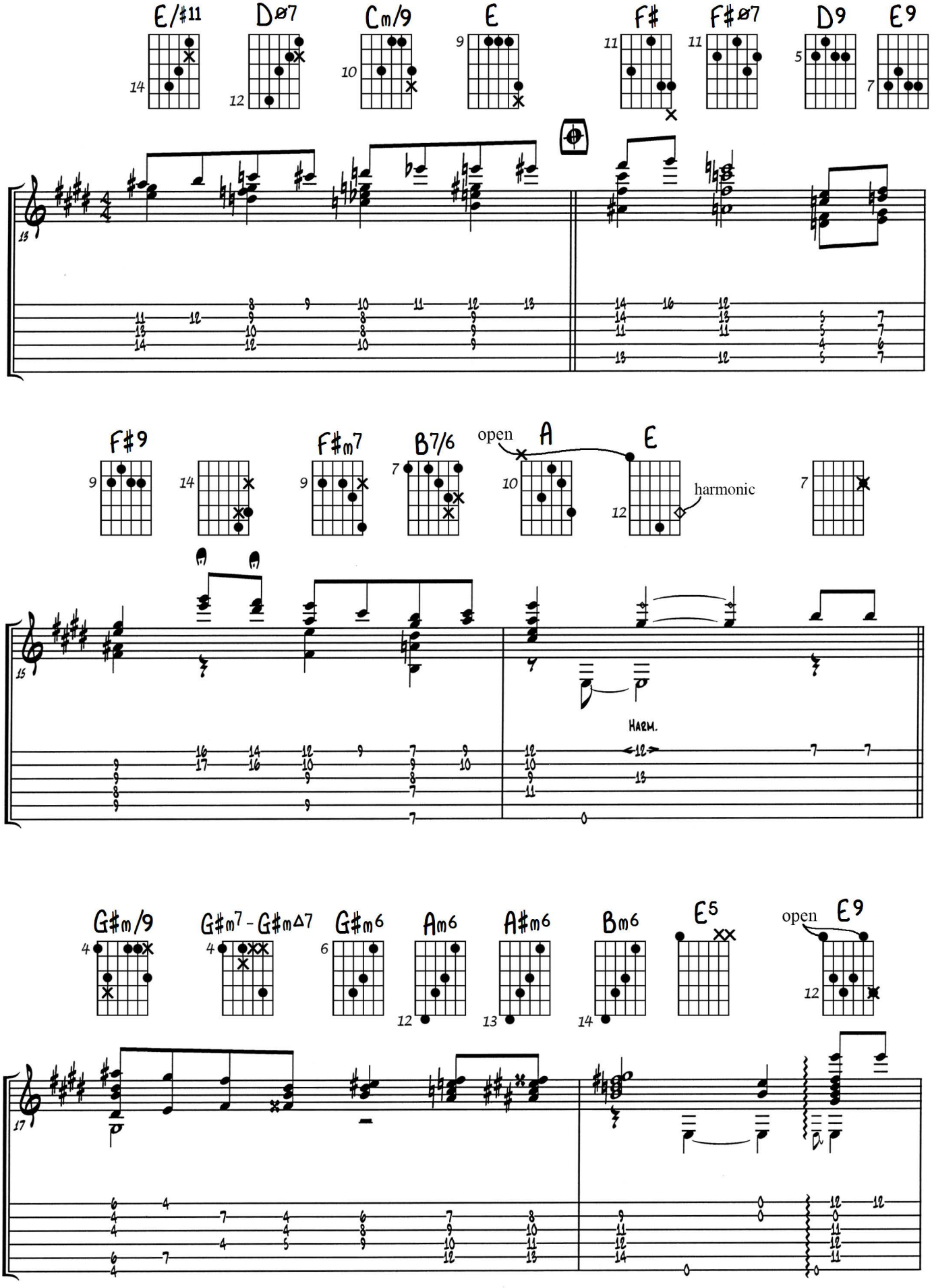
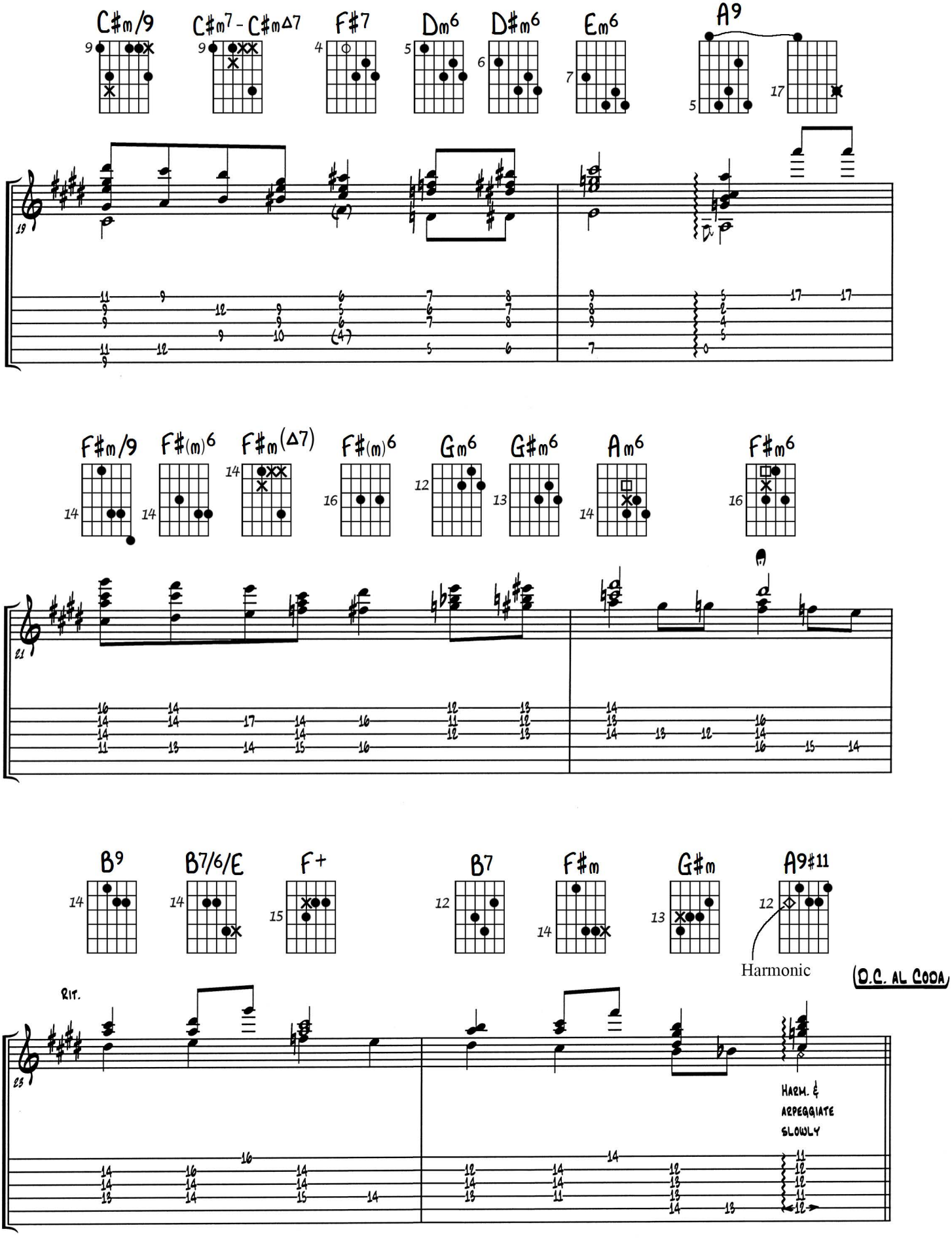
Am6
A△7
F♯7
F♯ø7


E
Am6
A△7
F♯7
F♯ø7
(On Repeat: Add Slide)


E/♯11
D∅7
Cm/9
E
F♯
F♯∅7
D9
E9
F♯9
F♯m7
B7/6
open
A
E
harmonic
HARM.
G♯m/9
G♯m7 - G♯mΔ7
G♯m6
Am6
A♯m6
Bm6
E5
open
E9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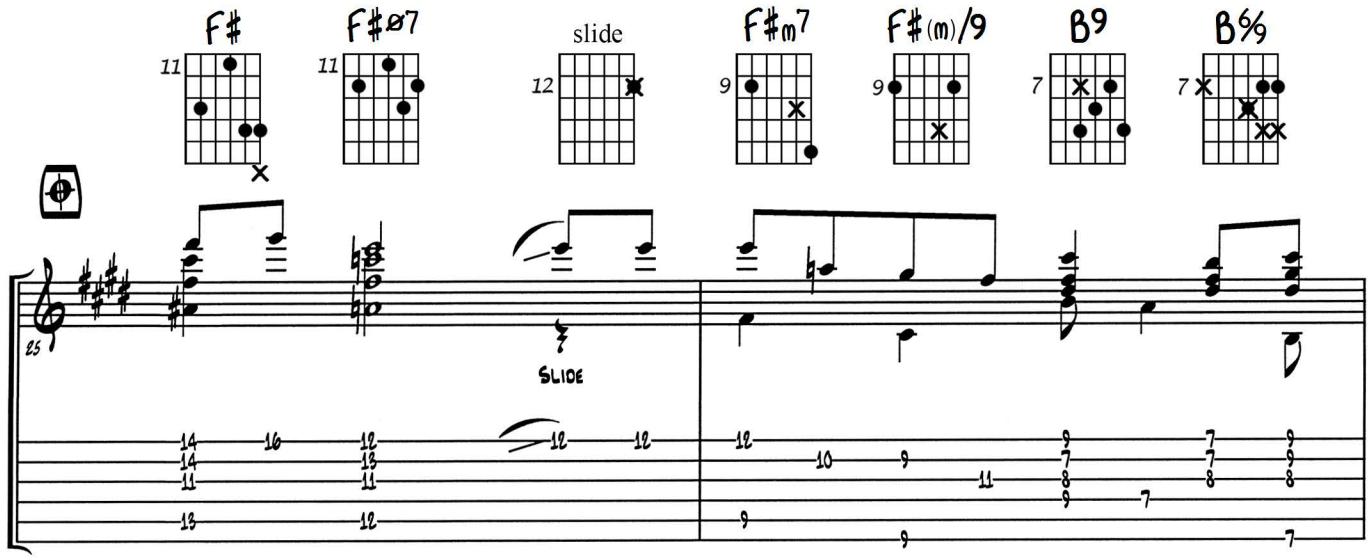
C#m7 - C#mΔ7
F#7
Dm6
D#m6
Em6
A9
F#m/9
F#(m)6
F#m(Δ7)
F#(m)6
Gm6
G#m6
Am6
F#m6
B9
B7/6/E
F+
B7
F#m
G#m
A9#11
Harmonic
D.C. AL CODA
RIT.
HARM. & ARPEGGIATE SLOWLY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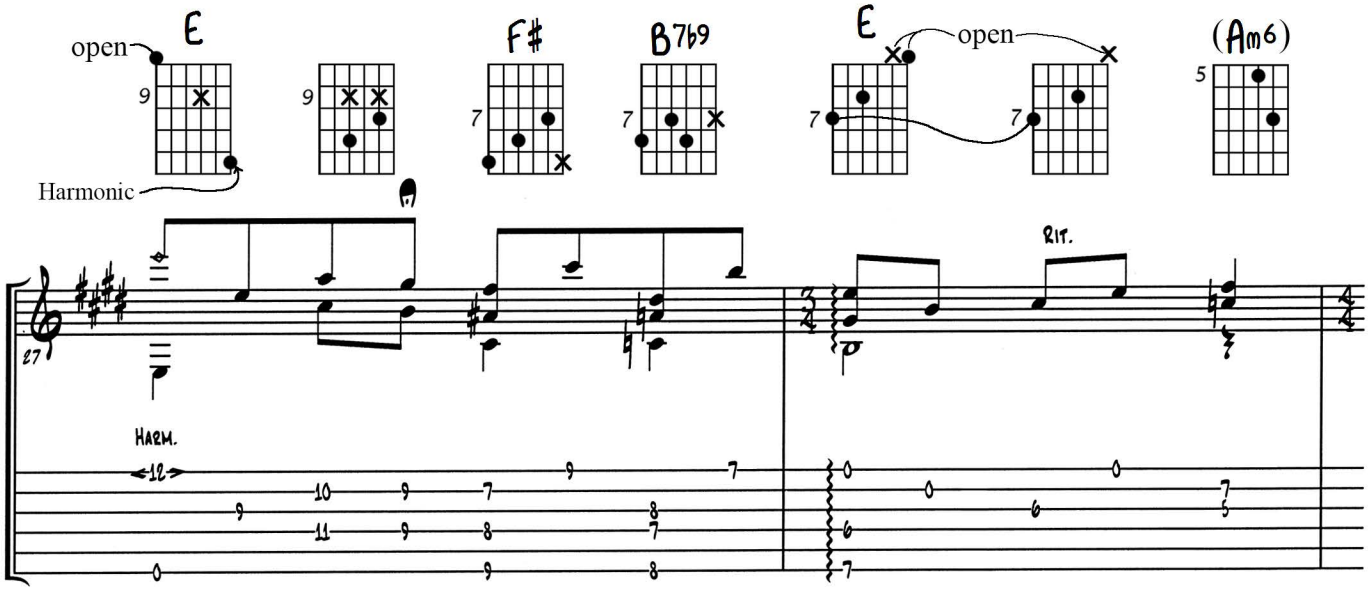
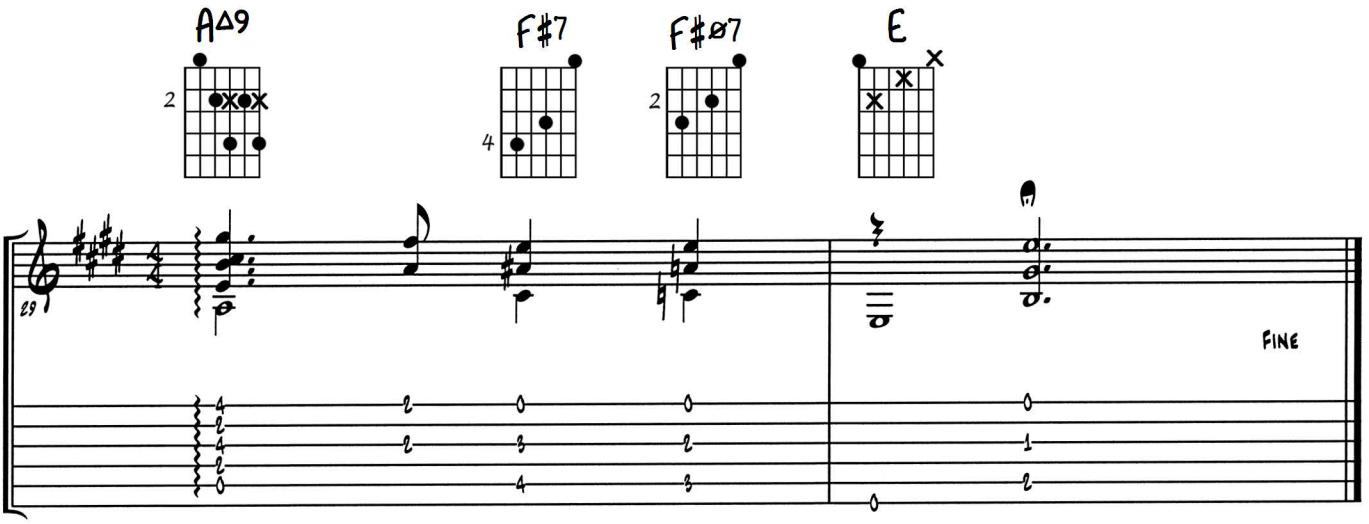
F#ø7
slide
F#m7
F#(m)/9
B9
B6/9
SLIDE


open
E
F#
B7b9
E
open
(Am6)
Harmonic
HARM.
RIT.

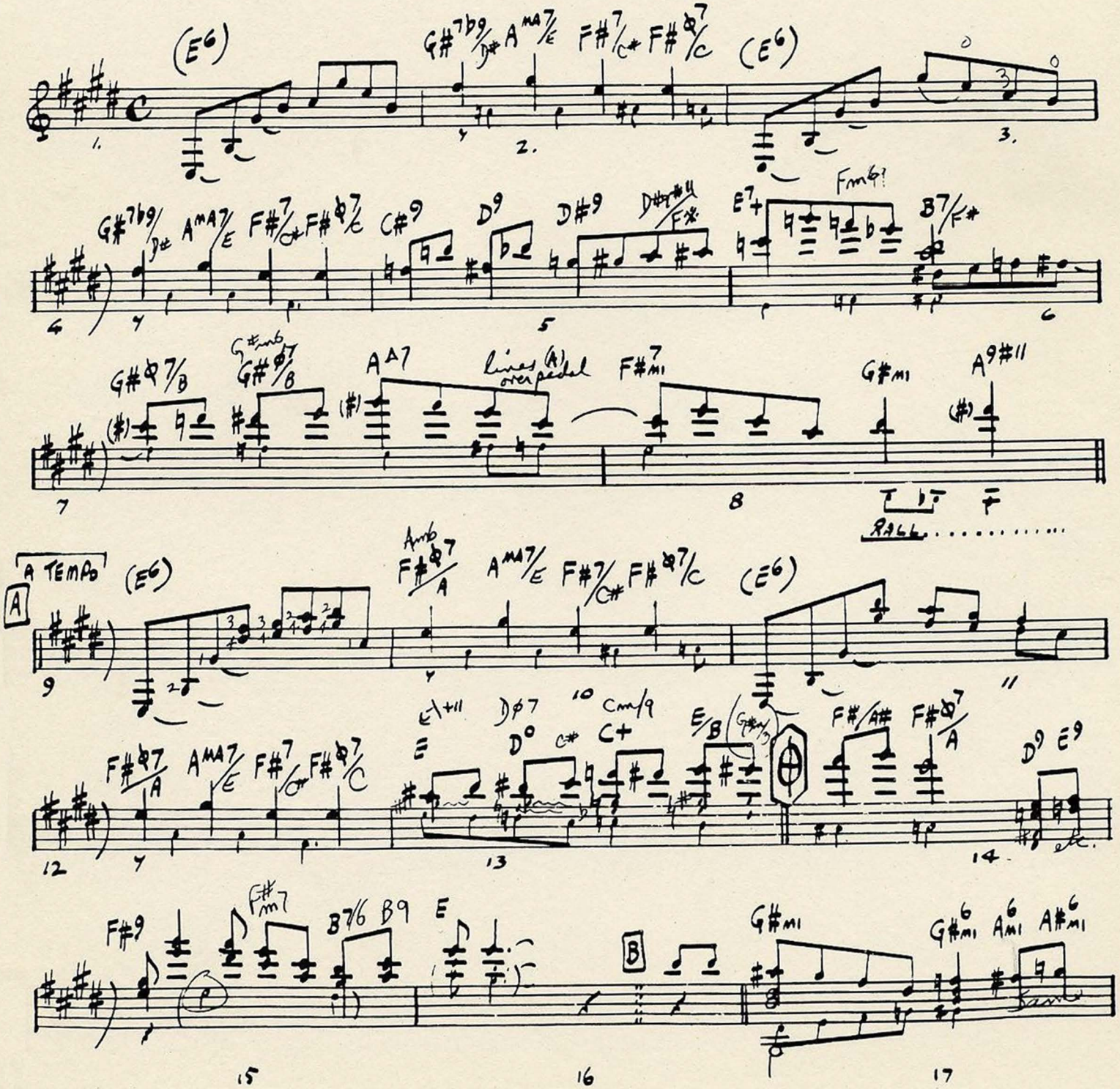

AΔ9
F#7
F#ø7
E
FINE

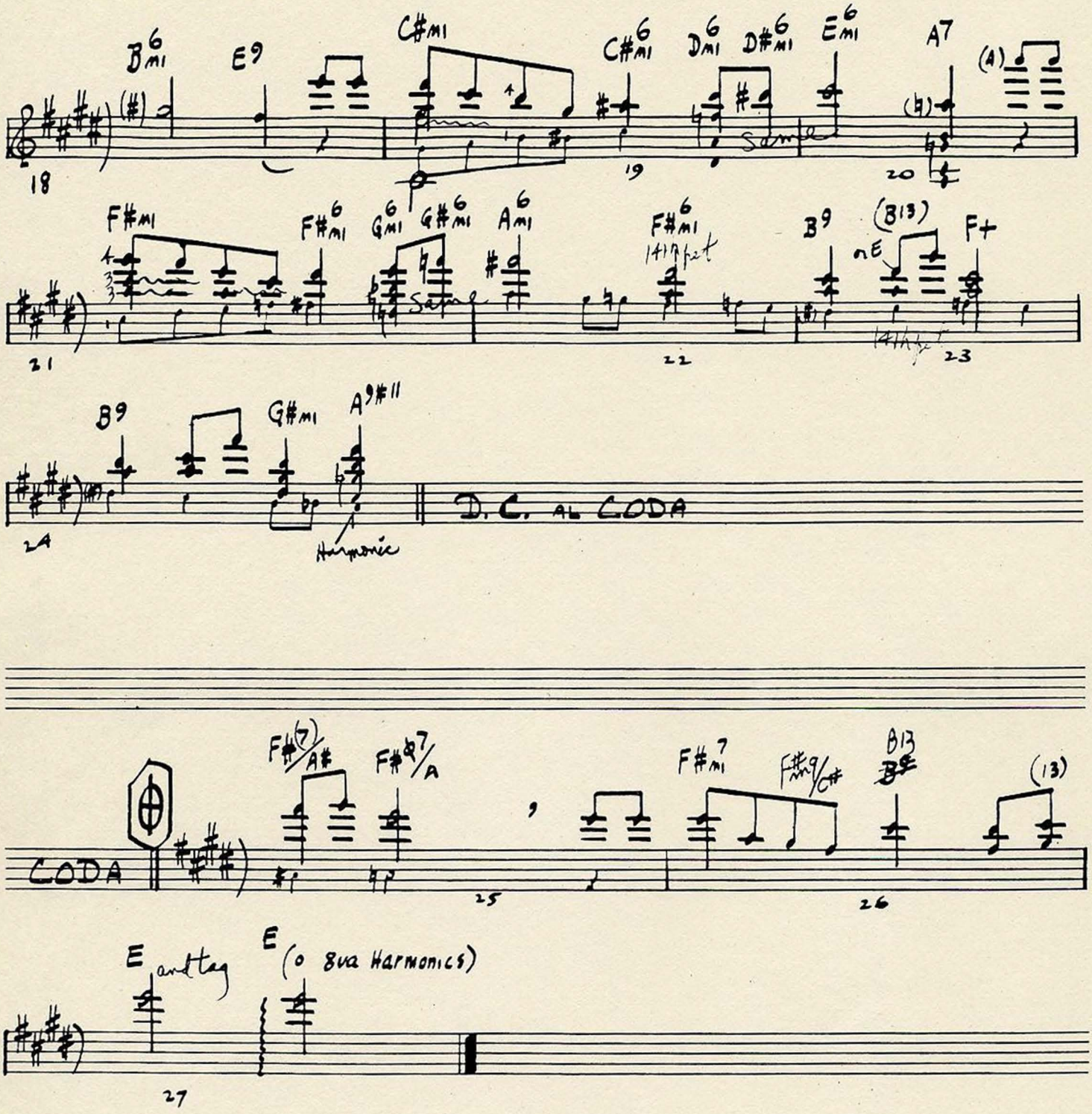
RY COODER

GUITAR

FLASHES

BY BIX BEIDERBECKE (©1927)
EDITED: WILLIAM CHALLIS
ARRANGED: JOSEPH BYRD (1977)




B6mi
E9
C#mi
C#6mi
D6mi
D#6mi
E6mi
A7
(A)
18
19
20
F#mi
F#6mi
G6mi
G#6mi
A6mi
F#6mi
B9
(B13)
F+
21
22
23
B9
G#mi
A9#11
2A
Harmonic
D.C. AL CODA
CODA
F#(7)/A#
F#9/A
F#7mi
F#m9/C#
B13
(13)
25
26
E
and tag
E
(8va Harmonics)
27

"FLASHES"

History, Comments, and Performance Notes

By Nick Stasinos

Connecting the dots! Paul Whiteman's Orchestra had premiered Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" in 1924. Bix Beiderbecke joined the Whiteman Orchestra in 1927. During that time Bix composed "In a Mist" (1927). Paul immediately had "In a Mist" arranged for his touring orchestra, undoubtedly looking for another "Rhapsody." Paul adored Bix, and when he became very sick soon after, Paul sent him home to Iowa, on salary, to recover from his alcoholism. While Bix was convalescing, he composed three more songs for piano. Bix was in a 'dark' place considering his titles: "Candlelights" (1930), "Flashes" (1931), and "In the Dark" (1931). Paul must have sensed the urgency, and sent his talented arranger, William "Bill" Challis after Bix to transcribe these songs. Bix never recovered from his declining health and died at the young age of 28 in 1931. Shortly after Bix's death, Bill had his publishing partner, Jack Robbins, publish all four songs under the main title *Modern Piano Suite* that same year.

Marketability? Were these songs considered jazz, a blend, or something else entirely? Some say Bix was inspired by the French impressionists, he experimented with some unusual chords for that time. *Modern Piano Suite* never really appealed to Bix's jazz fan base and these piano compositions, plus an earlier piano composition, "Davenport Blues" (1925), were purposely kept separate from the canon of his cornet work. Bill, trying to put a label on these, thought "tone-poems" might appeal to the instrument of the poet, the guitar, and started arranging these songs for five guitars. Bucky Pizzarelli picked up these guitar quintet arrangements from Bill Challis and recorded them for his 1974 album "Bucky Pizzarelli Playing the Piano Music of Bix Beiderbecke."

Joseph Byrd's inspiration for recording the Beiderbecke tunes? Was there some connection from the Pizzarelli release a few years prior? In the late 1970's, Joseph Byrd approached Ted Greene to help out with the guitar chord arrangements on three Bix Beiderbecke songs ("Davenport Blues," "In a Mist," and "Flashes") for a very unique recording project with Ry Cooder – a new album titled, "Jazz" (1978). Joseph knew Ted previously from working on his album "Joe Byrd & The Field Hippies: The American Metaphysical Circus" (1968). Shortly afterwards, Ted's phenomenal book *Chord Chemistry* was released (1971). Out of Ted's vast knowledge of harmony and chords, as applied to the guitar, who else in the entire world would qualify for such a grand task? Out of the three Beiderbecke songs selected, "Flashes" was the only piece to encompass the entire harmony on solo guitar. Not all of the piano score was carried over into this guitar arrangement. There is an interlude section in the piano score that was left out. Ry's recollection of Ted on this project:

> *"I was working on a jazz album and wanted to transcribe some of Bix Beiderbecke arrangements for guitar," Cooder said, referring to the cornet player. "I thought it was hard stuff, but it wasn't to Ted. He created arrangements that sounded like eccentric Beiderbecke."*
> *(Los Angeles Times, August 10, 2005, B11)*

My transcription? At first it was just a hybrid arrangement from Ted's original ideas and Ry Cooder's studio recording captured in chord grid diagrams from several lessons I took from Ted over the span of a decade (1981 – 1993). In 2011 I started transcribing and posting it in the TedGreene.com *Forums* under the title "Bix Beiderbecke" as an invitation for all readers to collaborate, and to prompt some discussion. I only got as far as measure 12 before interest waned. Eleven years later, after Paul Vachon's request to complete and post my transcription for the April 2022 Newsletter, it quickly became my number one New Year's resolution to complete. After bouncing these five sheets back and forth between Paul and myself, we arrived at what you are presented with today: The definitive transcription of "Flashes" as played by Ry Cooder on his "Jazz" album. A very special thanks goes to Paul Vachon for his help in proofreading and adding the chord diagrams.

Upon transcribing any song, many decisions take place, depending on its length and complexity. If you get too literal, it can get too messy looking on the page. I remember seeing an example of this with Earl Klugh's arrangement of "Ain't Misbehavin'" that Steve Vai transcribed for *Guitar Player* magazine. As a follow up, Steve added the actual held, tied notes for a couple measures. What a train wreck! The 'art' of transcribing a song, especially for publication, is to make it look beautiful on the page; visually inviting and easier to read. A big publisher I worked for once said, "The less ink, the less paper, the better!" It's not just for their bottom line, it's also easier on the musician's eyes. Yes, there is a compromise. The compromise I made? I wrote this song out in two lines of music, rather than three. This will bring into question certain notes being held longer than what you see notated. This is a difficult song to sustain certain notes as Ry found out all too well. Try to sustain the notes in this song as much as possible. I offer a brief overview of the music and suggest fingering alternatives in my "Performance Notes." I didn't add finger numbers to most of this transcription, leaving it open for you to fill in your favorite fingerings.

To begin, Ry is tuned down a half-step from concert in his studio recording. Ted told me on more than one occasion that E flat was his favorite tuning. Coincidence? I referenced Ry's "Soundstage, Chicago, 1978" video for his fingerings and neck positions. On that video, Ry is tuned at standard concert pitch. I transcribed the studio recording at concert pitch, E major, and included a note to tune down a half-step if you want to play along with the recording. In our first pass, when we got to the bridge playing way up past the 12^{th} fret, Ted mentioned Ry was playing an acoustic archtop with a cutaway and very low string action. If you don't have one of those, your electric guitar will do just fine!

"Performance Notes"

We will visit each measure together to explore a variety of different ways to play a passage, fingering alternatives, and compared what Ted and Ry had worked out.

Measure 1: Sustain all the notes as much as possible. That's what those swooping lines off of the notes in the session chart mean. On beat 3, your 1st finger will play the C# note, placing your hand in the proper position to play the G# note with the 4th finger. There are other ways to play this, but you will be playing the B bass note with your 2nd finger on the repeat later on so this is the only way.

Measure 2: On the session chart as well as in the original piano score, each chord is played with a corresponding note following. Not here! Ry plays these four chords without the following note; thus, the chords are played rhythmically closer, hence 3/4 time for measures 2 and 4. Fingering suggestion: Double-stop strings 5 and 6 with the 2nd finger for Amaj7. Then move it all down for F#7 chord.

Measure 3: Ted called this "Koto" after the Japanese stringed instrument from beat 3, starting with the pull-off and proceeding open and fretted notes ala Chet Atkins.

Measure 4: The same chords as measure 2, but the last two chords are on lower string sets, higher up the neck. Try to double-stop strings 5 and 6 with the 2nd finger for F#7.

Measure 5: Stretch! For the D9 chord on the 2nd beat, Ry swaps his 4th finger for his 3rd in order to free up his 4th finger to reach up and play the A# note on the 2nd string, 11th fret. Ted originally intended this note to be played on the 1st string, 6th fret, keeping the 4th finger traveling up the bass for the first three chords. Yes, it's a stretch, but well worth practice for a smoother transition. Ted always said, "Nature has a way of reshaping your hands!"

Measure 6: Here's an option: Instead of a full bar on the Fm7 chord, try re-fingering it to include the D note on the 3rd string, 12th fret, as the Fm6 on the chart. For the next chord, B7, that pinky is going to lift off of the A note from the 2nd string to play the following ascending notes on the 3rd string. Here are two ways to go about it. The pinky gets all three ascending chromatic notes following the initial B7 chord or collapse your 3rd finger, flattening it down to get the E note on the 3rd string first while your pinky gets the other two notes. This allows that A to ring just a little bit longer. That's what Ry does on the Soundstage video. He even lifts his hand while adding vibrato to that last F# note with his pinky finger.

Measure 7: The first two chords on the session chart were replaced with better sounding chords you can barre. For the repeat, simply play the open A bass on the 5th string slightly before the Amaj7 chord indicated by the grace note tied to the same pitched note (a Howard Heitmeyer idiom). This happens again in measures 18 and 20.

Measure 8: Here's an option for G#m on the 3rd beat: Move the G# from the 4th string to the 2nd string, an octave higher, as Ted did. To barre or not to barre? If you choose to finger those notes individually, you can continue to sustain the upper notes, freeing up your 1st finger to move down a half step to that passing tone before arriving at A9#11.

Measure 9: Like measure 2, but with ascending thirds! Ted described this as "very Chopin like." There are several ways to play this measure. Ry cuts the sustain of the first E bass in order to sustain the following notes by playing this Emaj9 chord shape mid-neck and places his hand closer to the sequence of thirds he will be playing next. I added some finger numbers here for what Ry played. If you want that E bass to sustain longer, experiment!

Measure 10: Just like measure 3, with the exception of the 1st chord being Am6. Just an observation here: I don't think Ry plays all 4 notes of these chords in the Soundstage video. He just plays 3 notes excluding the 4th string after the Am6 chord for ease of movement.

Measure 11: Now with descending 3rds! Here is my preferred alternative: Instead of playing the G# and E notes on the 9th fret, play them on the 1st and 2nd strings with the 1st and 2nd fingers at the 4th position and move up your 2nd finger from the E on the 5th fret to the F# on the 7th fret, as a guide finger, to finish it up. On the repeat, Ry makes haste on the studio recording, playing the 4th beat notes rhythmically quicker as a 16th to a dotted 8th.

Measure 12: Same as measure 10, but the chords are played mid-neck like in measure 4. Brush that last chord with your thumb.

Measure 13: The session chart has contrary motion moving in 8th notes in the bass and soprano for the first half of the measure. That's how I first learned it from Ted, at the 6th position. Ry only plays the ascending, chromatic melody line as 8th notes. Focus your ear also on the descending quarter note bass line, ending in the next measure on A.

Measure 14: For the F# chord, Ry's pinky barres the 1st two strings and then his pinky jumps up to get that G# note. Ted showed me a different voicing here, but Ry's chord sets us up to get to that next chord so much easier.

Measure 15: Those two descending 3rd intervals on the 2nd beat with the fermatas? The circled E note between them on the session chart was played by Ry on the Soundstage video. If you want it, just lift up your finger momentarily to strike the open 1st string before placing it down for the next interval. There's plenty of time to do that!

Measure 16: Not on the session chart, Ry inserts the IV chord, A, before resolving to E. For E, Ry plays that interval with the harmonic on the 1st string and G# on the 3rd string, 13th fret, rather than on the 2nd string, 9th fret. It is a jump, but Ry was playing it safe from accidentally muting that harmonic. I prefer the G# on 2nd string. Your choice!

Measure 17: The bridge starts with a G#m/9 barre chord with the moving contrary lines extend from that. Ry, in the Soundstage video, reaches all the way over with his pinky to get that E note on the 5th string, then darts back to get that F# on the 2nd string. Only Ry can get away with that! Simply shift your 3rd finger up on the 5th string a half step and your 4nd finger is free to get F# on the 2nd string. Next, your 2nd finger gets the F## on the 4th string, 5th fret. Try to sustain as many notes as possible while holding the barre. Remember this fingering movement because it will happen again in measure 19, at the 9th fret. In the 2nd half of this measure, there's more stretching! Ted originally intended the next three chords to be 4-note chords, but I've noticed certain symmetry in this arrangement

demanding with a lighter chord at the beginning of this ascending sequence of minor 6 chords. It is also simpler to grab the first chord, G#m6, as a 3-note chord without the root on the 5th string, 11th fret. You can add the root if you want!

Measure 18: The Bm6 ends this sequence of ascending minor 6th chords from the previous measure resolving to E. The E9 chord shape came from the Soundstage video. In the studio recording, Ry sweeps this chord so quickly, it is impossible to hear the individual notes. I am confident this was what he used both times.

Measure 19: Remember measure 17? Yes, you do that all over again at the 9th fret. On the 2nd half of the measure, more ascending minor 6th chords, but these are wider, easier voicings to play. Ry plays the F# bass, probably by mistake. It doesn't sound bad, but it does change the chord name to F#7. Maybe he was going for the 5th string and accidentally landed on the 4th? In the Soundstage video, Ry only plays the three top notes C#, E, and A# which is a C#m6 without any bass. Remember the symmetry, a lighter chord starts this ascending sequence of minor 6 chords? I prefer the lighter 3-note chord for C#m6. So, now you have three different ways to play this chord.

Measure 20: The Em6 ends the sequence of ascending minor 6th chords from the previous measure. Remember to play the A bass slightly before the rest of the A9 chord.

Measure 21: F#m/9 chord is fingered with the 1st finger on the C# (4th string, 11th fret), barre the upper strings with the 3rd finger with the pinky on the 16th fret, 1st string. On the next chord, the barred 3rd finger remains, the bass comes up to D# played with either the 2nd or, preferred, the 1st finger because you are continuing up to barre the 3rd and 4th strings on the 14th fret for the next two chords. More ascending minor 6th chords, but all the lighter 3-note variety.

Measure 22: Each chord in this measure has a descending chromatic bass line. That C natural half-note in the Am6? Do me a favor, take your trusty music pencil and fill in that C natural half note head to look a like that A quarter note on the following chord, F#m6. What is important is to keep that top note ringing for a at least a half note value as the bass descends accordingly for each chord. Don't hold that fermata for its full half-note plus value either! It's more like a brief hold, a fermata on quarter-note or even a breath mark (//), before continuing on.

Measure 23: I barre both the 13th fret with my 1st finger and the 14th fret with my 2nd finger. For the next chord, I move my 1st finger bar up to the 14th fret, barring the 1st and 2nd strings with my 3rd finger. While the 1st finger, still barred at the 14th fret, the 2nd finger plays the F on the 15th fret, 4th string, then lift off for the next note, E, on beat 4.

Measure 24: This B7 chord is easier enough! On the next chord, the 1st finger gets the C# on the 11th fret, 4th string, while barring with the 3rd finger across 1st, 2nd, and 3rd strings on the 14th fret. For the next chord on beat 3, Ry plays the G#m above the 12th fret. Here's an alternative: String transfer to the higher set of strings for better timbre, with the melody on the 1st string, 7th fret. You can even prep your 2nd finger here to double-stop the 2nd and 3rd strings so when you play the descending bass all the other strings remain ringing. On Last chord, make sure you strike the harmonic on the 5th string on the 4th beat as you follow up slowly and in time with the remainder of the A9#11 arpeggio. On the Soundstage video, Ry plays the 5th string as a regular open A.

DC al Coda: Now go to the beginning of the song and play up to the coda in measure 13, adding all the extra notes and nuances.

Measure 25: Coda! This is the same as measure 14, with the exception of the last two 8th notes.

Measure 26: Suggested fingering: Make a full barre on the 9th fret for the 1st half of the measure and move that bar to the 7th fret for the 2nd half to make it easier to play.

Measure 27: After this measure, it is "uncharted territory." On the session chart, this would be the last measure. The "tag" takes three more measures, and it is all Ry! He moves the 12th fret E harmonic on the session chart from the 3rd beat to the 1st beat. Let that harmonic ring along with the open E bass as long as possible while playing everything in between. Prep a partial barre for the 9th fret middle strings for the G# and B soon to be played and A and C# afterwards. After the F# chord, apply a full barre on the 7th fret for the last B altered dominant chord.

Measure 28: Move the 2nd finger down from C to B on the 6th string, the 1st finger gets the G# on the 4th string, 6th fret. After striking the open B on the 2nd string, the 1st finger moves over to the 6th fret, the 3rd string to get the C#, and then play the E open on the 1st string. The 1st finger moves down to the C natural and add the 3rd or 4th finger on F# to play that interval together (Am6).

Measure 29: Apply a partial barre and brush the Amaj9 chord with your thumb and pull off your fingers from the barre to play the following notes. At this point, play the descending intervals each time with the open E on the 1st string. Ted pointed out, it's very reminiscent of that blues vamp Eric Clapton played with Cream in the 60's, "I'm So…

Measure 30: E "…Glad!" So simple, yet so effective! Fine!