Melodic Improvisation 1

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Select one or two songs that you that you really love that you would like to play in your own creative way, adding jazz embellishments where you choose to do so. Play these songs every time you practice. You should soon be able to play them without using notation. Learning the following techniques will enable you to play wonderfully creative and satisfying songs.

Structure

Use information about sections and motives from other lessons to study the structure of the piece.

Rhythm

Play the rhythm the way it sounds and feels to you—not the way it is notated. If you sometimes do this anyway, now you can do it without guilt. Generally, slow ballads are played with even eighth notes rather than swing (uneven) eighth notes, but swing if that's the way you like it.

Phrasing

Generally, when playing ballads, start and end phrases softly. Taper the end of the phrase to silence, then leave some space before starting the next phrase. Listen to some old Frank Sinatra recordings. He leaves a lot of space at the end of phrases.

Listen

Listen to performers you really like and see if you can use some of the ideas you hear.

Melodic Embellishments

Practice the following melodic embellishments by using them frequently. After that, use them sparingly. It is easy to overdo. Just a few of these in a song can sound wonderful, but too many can sound awful.

Upper Neighbor (UN). On a long note in the melody, go to the note a step above and back to the melody note.

Lower Neighbor (LN). On a long note in the melody, go to the note below and back to the melody note.

Appoggiatura (A). Play the note a scale step above the melody note with slight emphasis and then taper to the melodic note,

Passing Tones (PT) . Fill in the interval between notes by playing diatonically (steps in the scale) or chromatically.

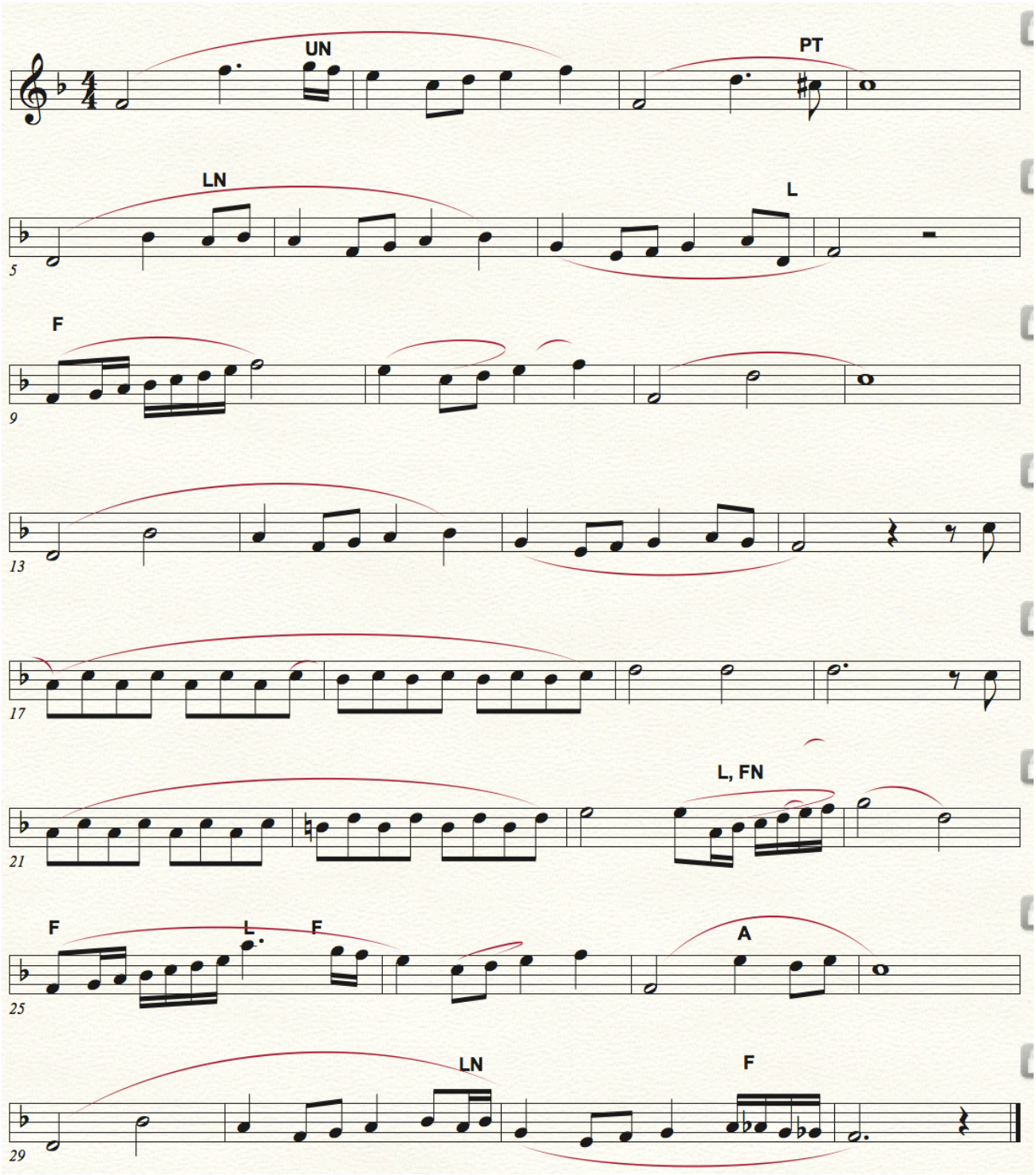
Turn (TN). Play the melody note, go to the note above, back to the melody note, then to the note below, back to the melody note and then be on your way. If the melody note is F, the turn would be FGFEF.This is done quickly. You hear it fairly often from jazz musicians.

Take a Leap (L). Play a note that is a large interval from the melodic note and then play to the melodic note, filling in the interval with notes in the key or a chromatic pattern.

Travel (T). Keep playing eighth notes in the key you are in until you decide to land on a melodic note.

There can be many more ways to improvise on a melody. Practicing these will give you a very good start.

Example xx. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" with Sample Ornamentation.



Assignment

Experiment with “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” leaving out the the ornamentation above and adding your own. Improvisation on melodies should become spontaneous. Try improvising on other melodies, using some of the techniques you have learned here.

Listen to recordings to see if you recognize any of the patterns.