A Classic from Pittsburgh

Module 7 of *Music: Under the Hood*

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Osher Course
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Outline

- Biography of Erroll Garner
- Analysis of *Misty*

Biography

- Erroll Garner, 1923-1977
  - Pittsburgh native
    - Watched his older siblings take piano lessons.
    - Started playing age 3.
    - Memorized classical compositions his siblings studied.

Biography

- Education
  - Attended George Westinghouse High School
    - As did Billy Strayhorn and Ahmad Jamal!
    - Band director advised against lessons.
    - Fits stereotype of self-taught jazz composer who cannot read music.
    - This is actually rare.

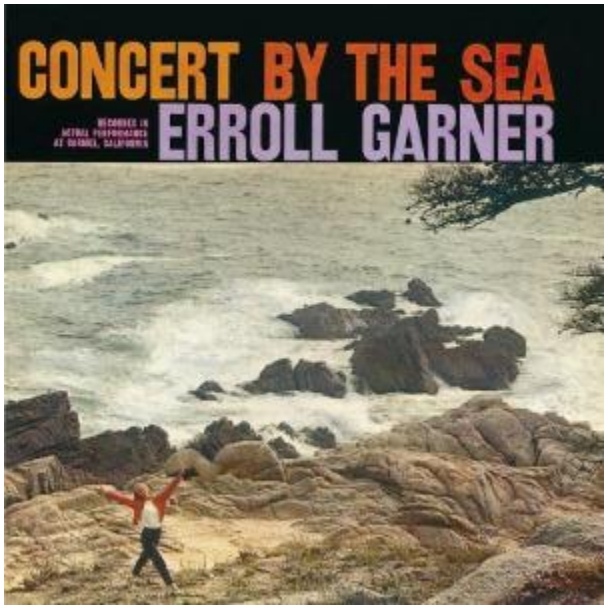
Biography

- Early experience
  - In Pittsburgh…
    - Played on KDKA at age 7
    - Played on Allegheny riverboats at age 11
    - Played with saxophonist Leroy Brown at age 14
  - Moved to New York City, age 21
    - Played with legendary Charlie Parker at age 24

Charlie Parker

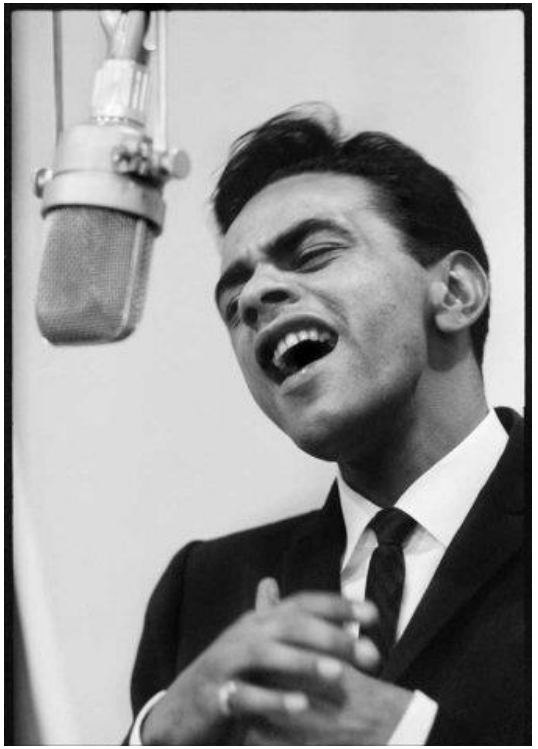
Biography

- Musical career
  - Known for prodigious memory and flawless improvisations.
    - When recording, one take was enough.
    - 1955 recording *Concert by the Sea* was best-selling jazz album of the day.
  - His song *Misty* became a jazz standard.
  - Appeared frequently on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*.



Misty

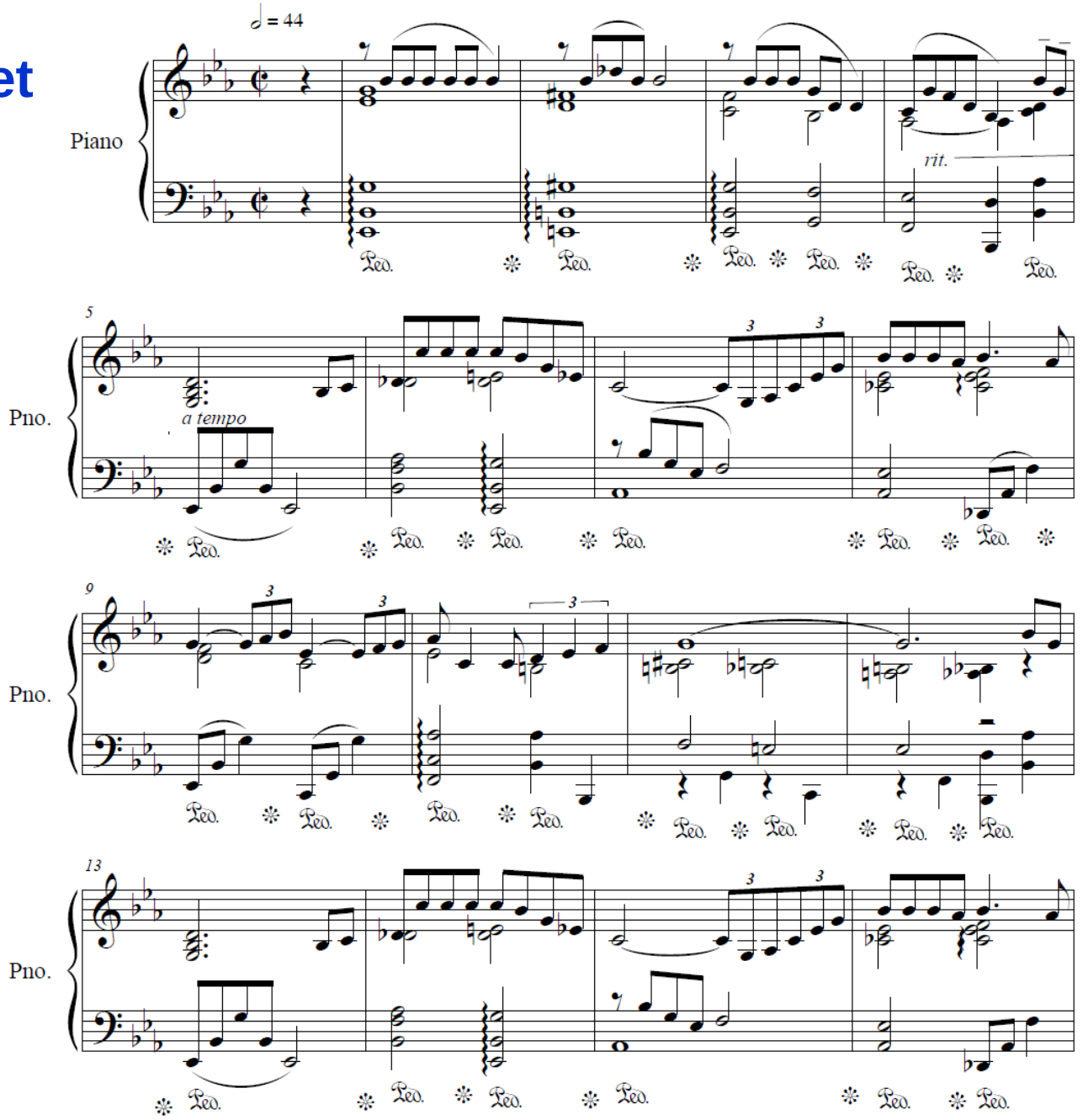
- Originally composed for piano, 1954
  - First recorded in Garner's album *Contrasts*, 1955
- Popularized by Johnny Mathis
  - Using lyrics by Johnny Burke
- Used in film *Play Misty for Me*, 1971
  - Directed by Clint Eastwood
- A jazz standard
  - Garner's best known song

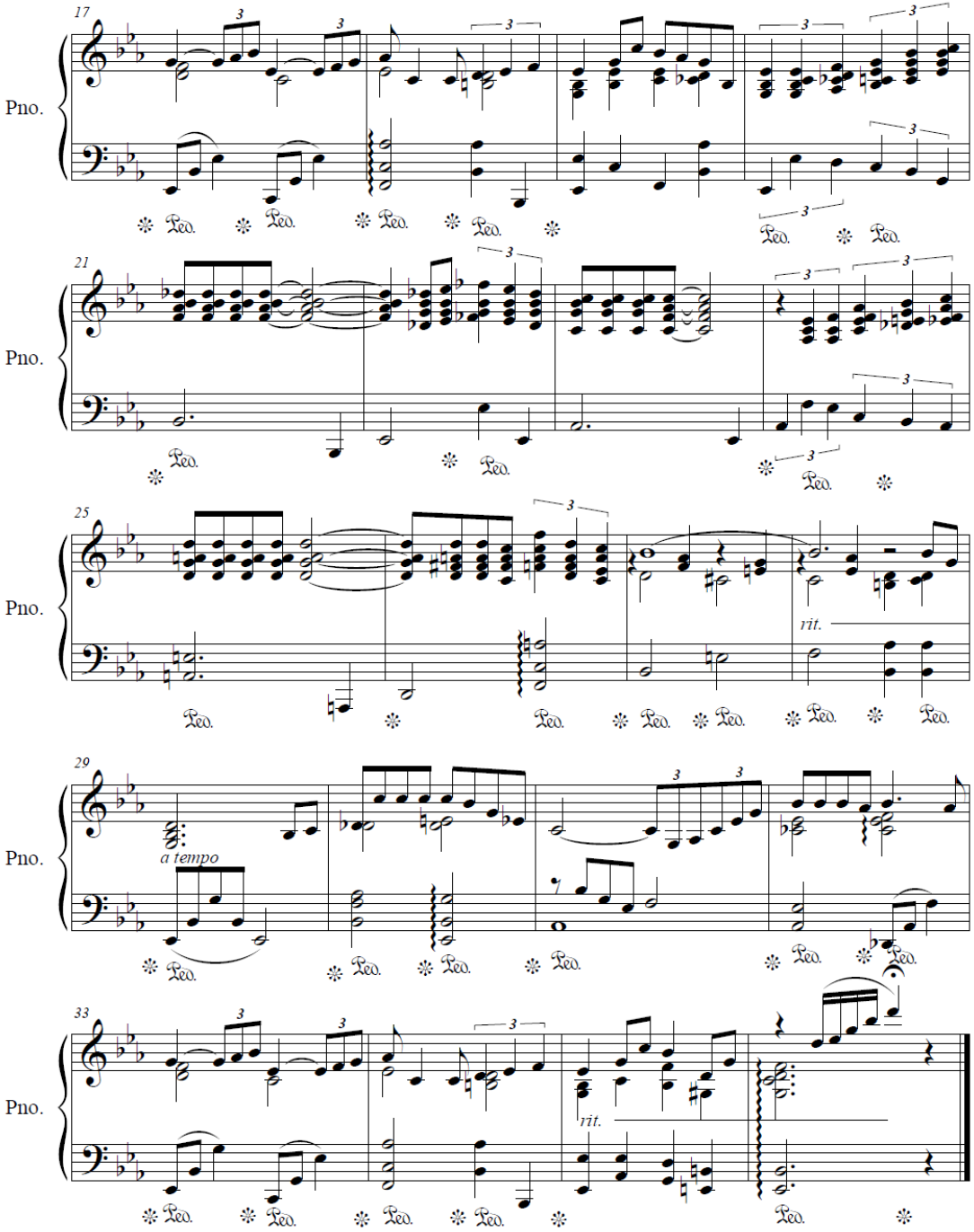


Johnny Mathis recording *Misty*, 1959

Original sheet music

Audio file




17
Pno.
21
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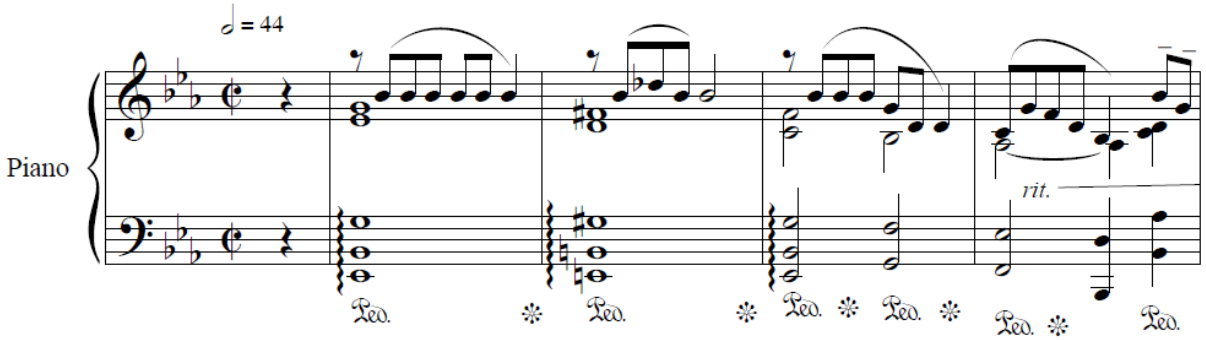
Misty

Audio file
(Erroll Garner at piano)

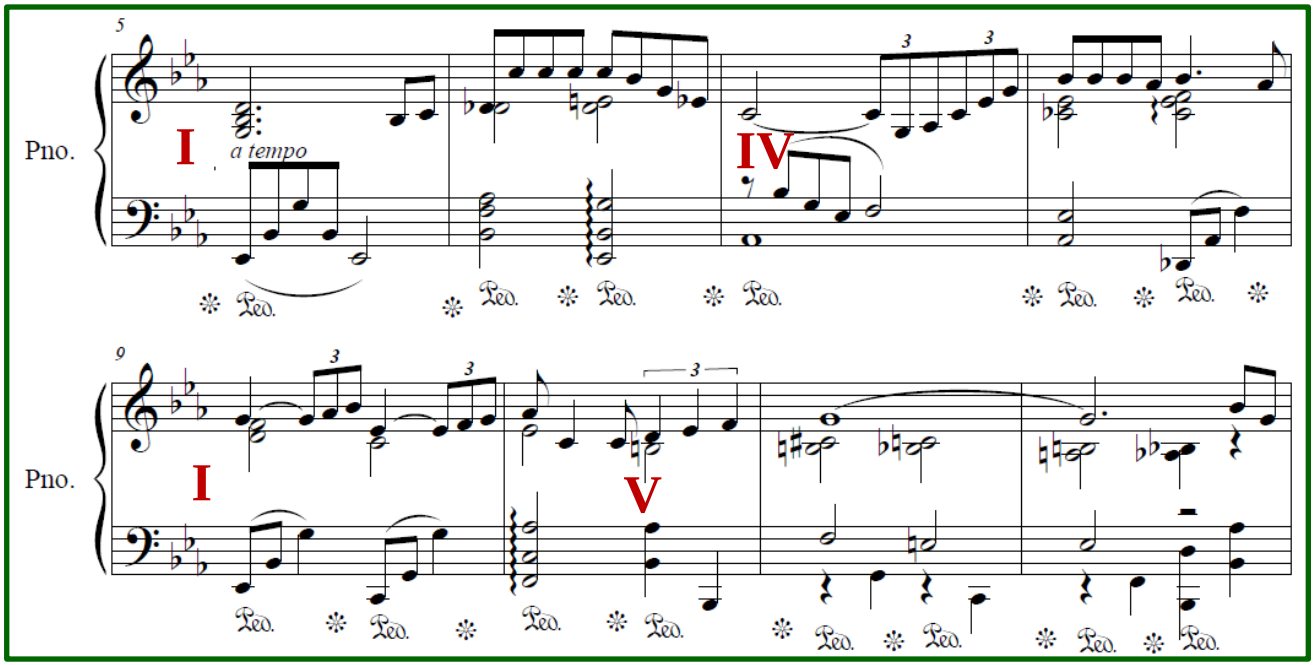
- What makes it work?
  A guess:
  - Classical structure
    - AABA form
    - Standard key sequence
  - Appealing melody
  - Reliance on standard jazz progression
    - **I-vi-ii-V-I** or **ii-V-I**
    - But with **very** interesting harmonic variations

Classic form

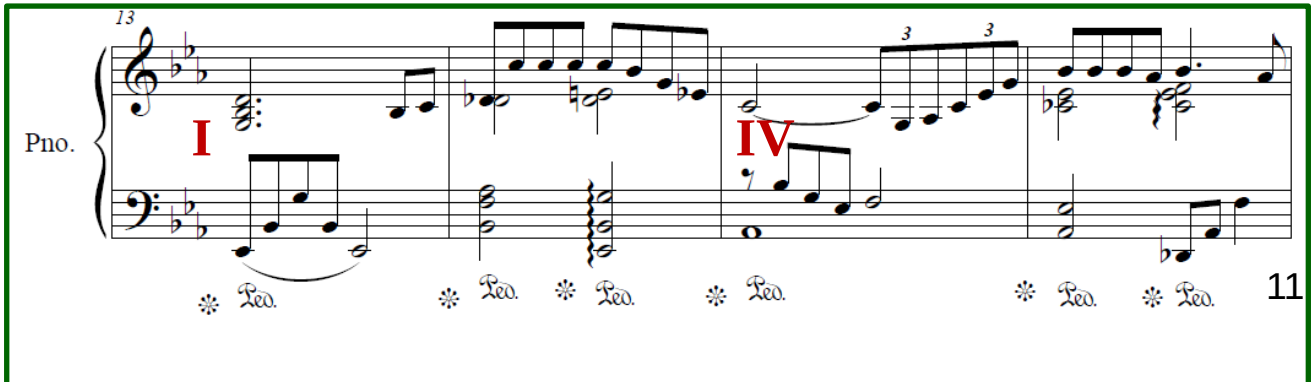
Audio file



Exposition



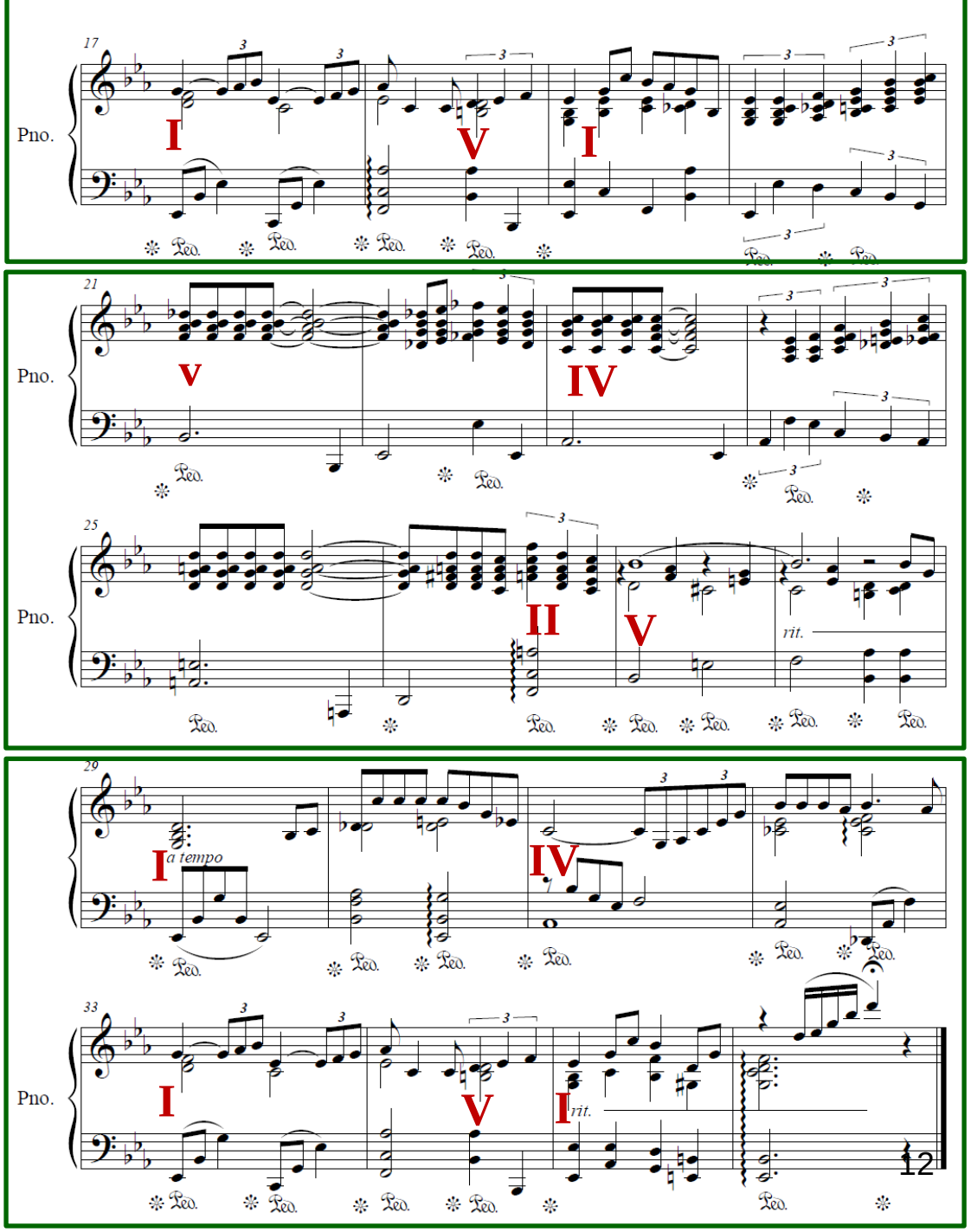
Exposition (repeat)



Exposition (repeat)

Development

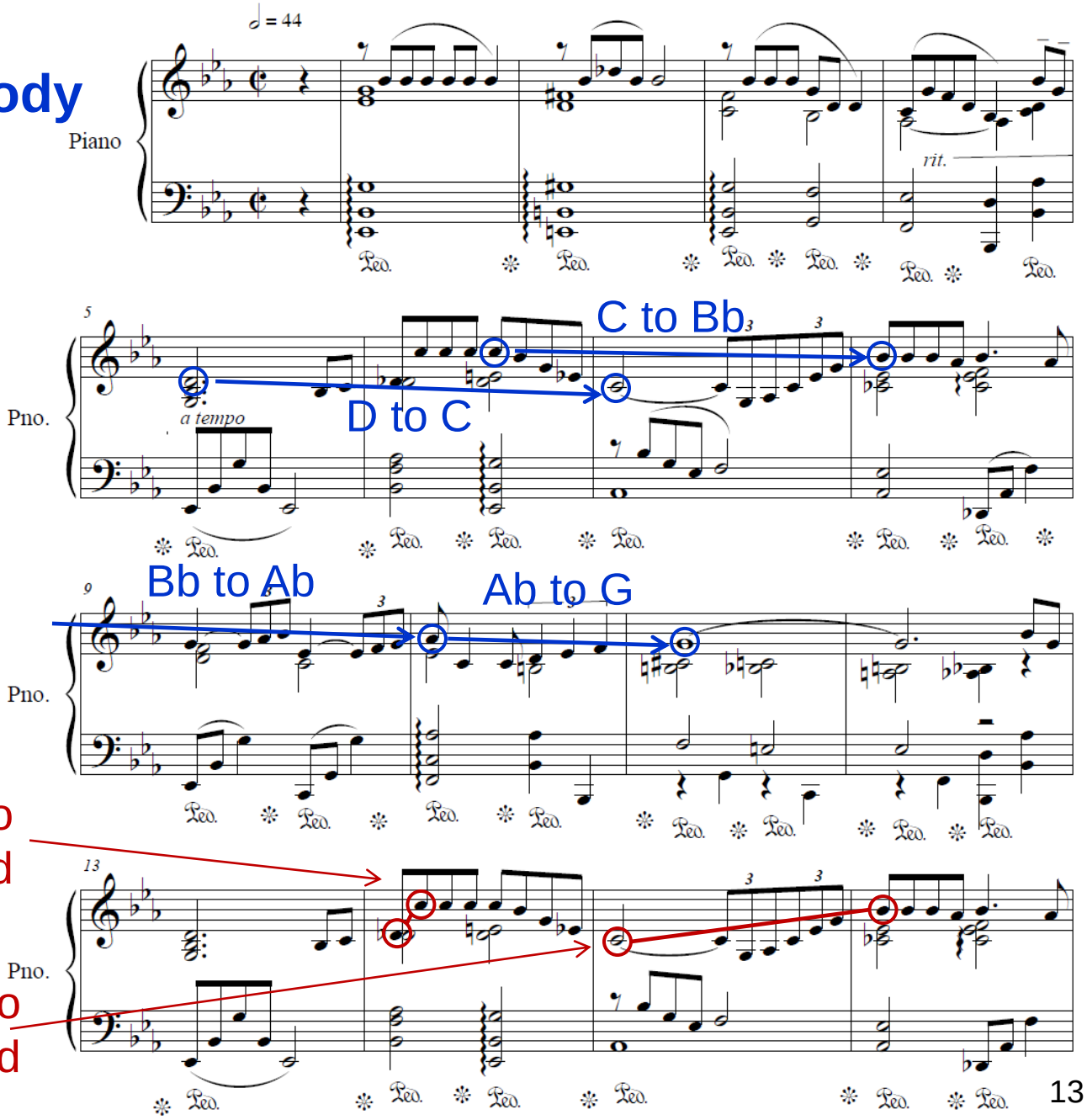
Recapitulation



Appealing Melody

Audio file

Naturally shaped melody due to descending notes

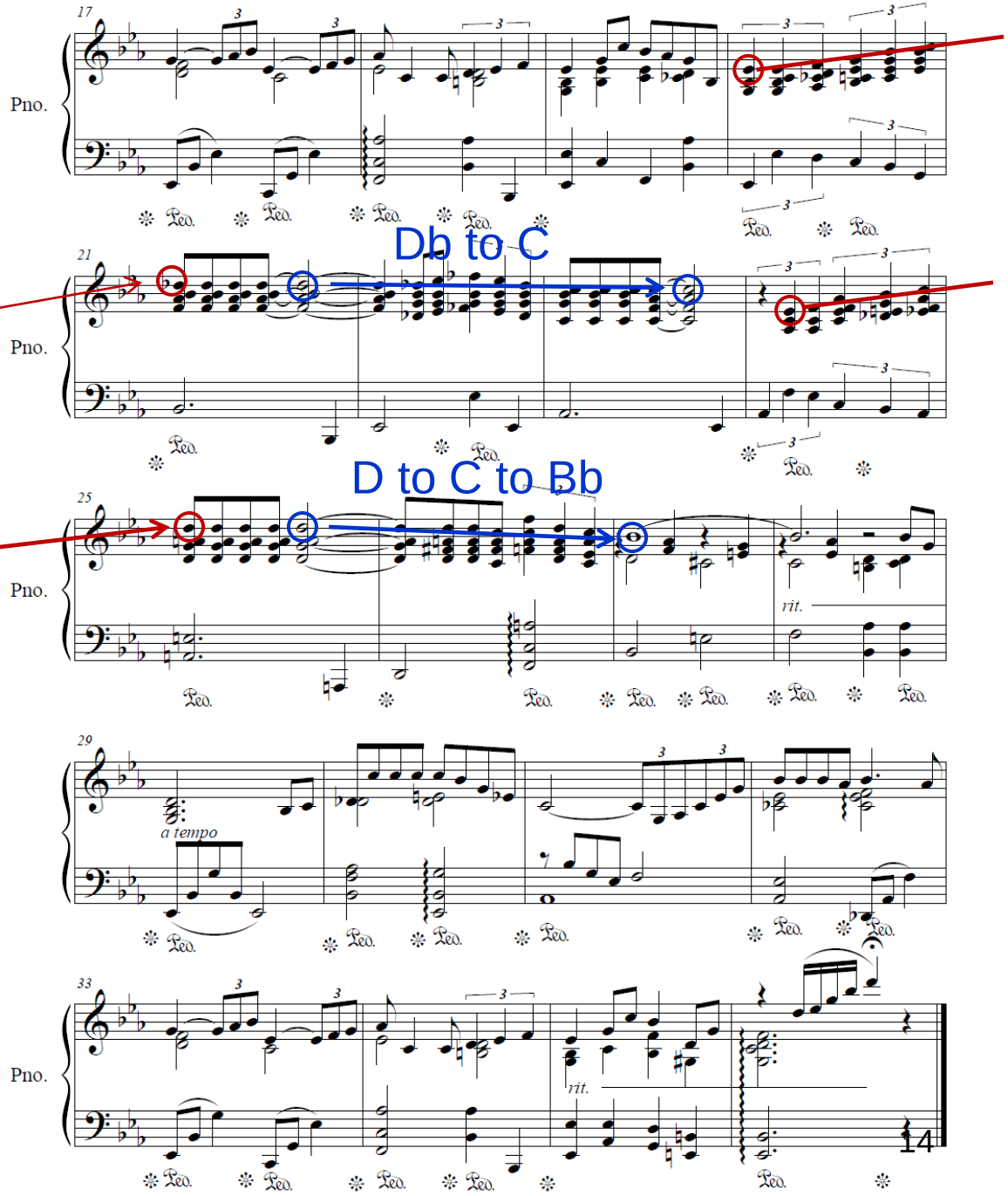


Jump of major 7th to 9th in minor 7-9 chord

Jump of minor 7th to 9th in minor 7-9 chord

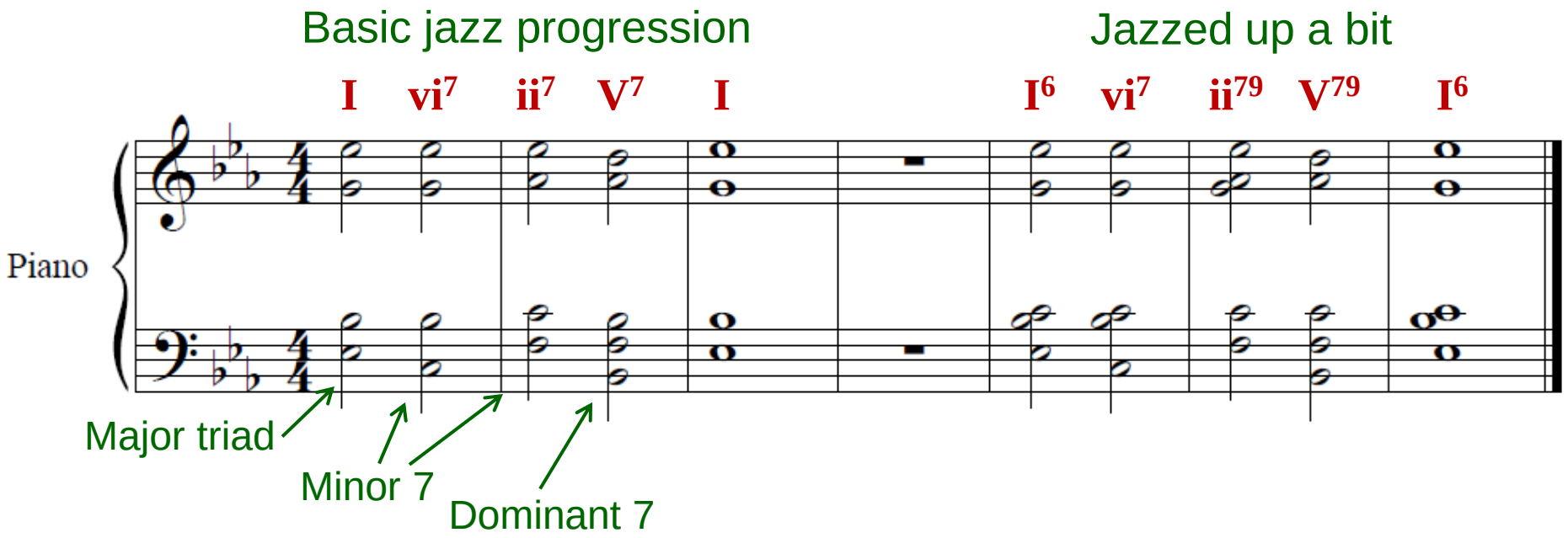
Jump of minor 7th
Eb to Db

Jump of major 7th
Eb to D



Audio file

Harmony can be explained as a series of **I-vi-ii-V-I** (or **ii-V-I**) riffs
Riff = a frequently used chord progression



Improvisation relies on combining **licks** and **riffs**
Lick = a frequently used sequence of notes

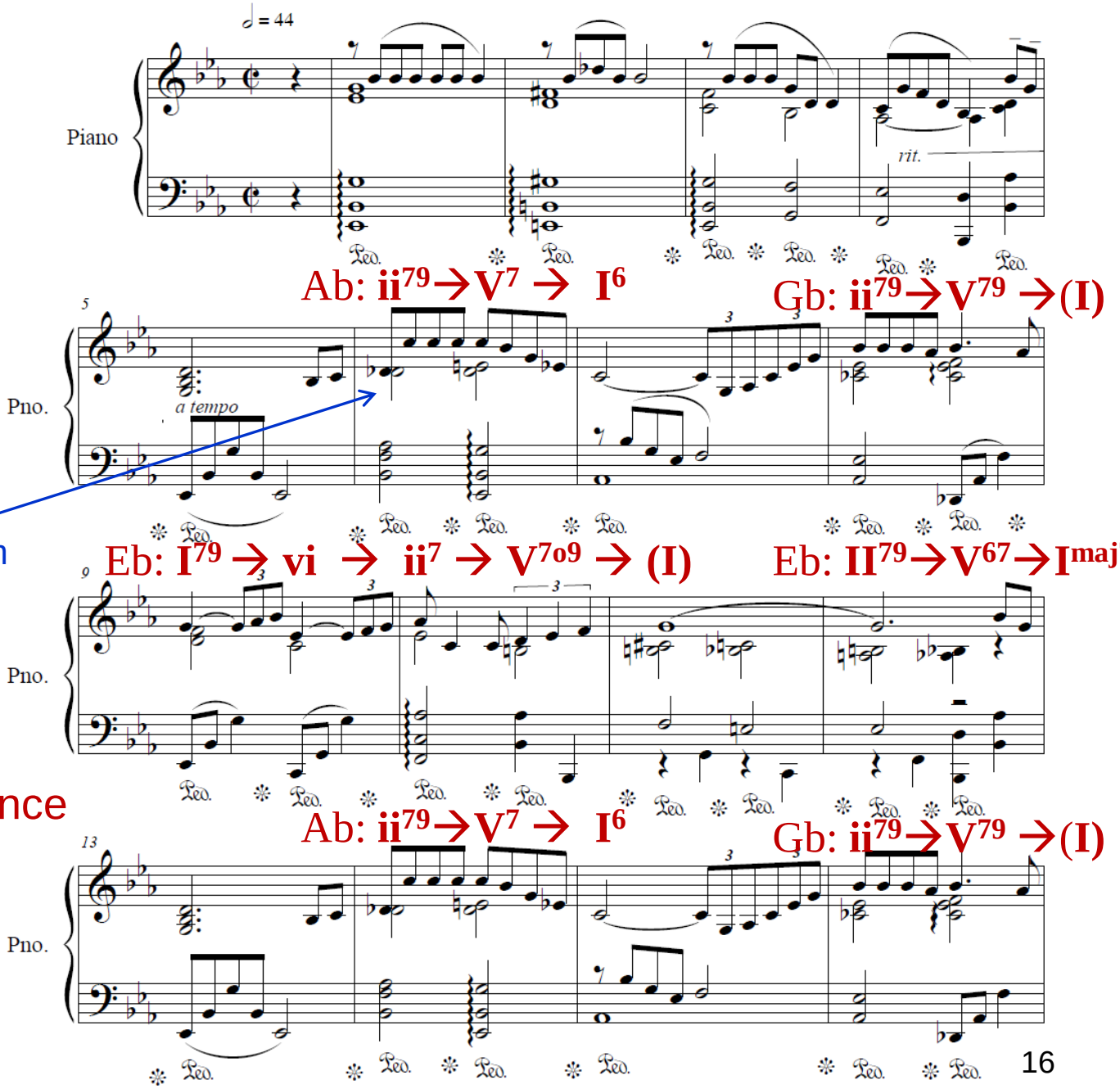
Audio file

Exposition

Some say Db results from **modal interchange** with mixolydian

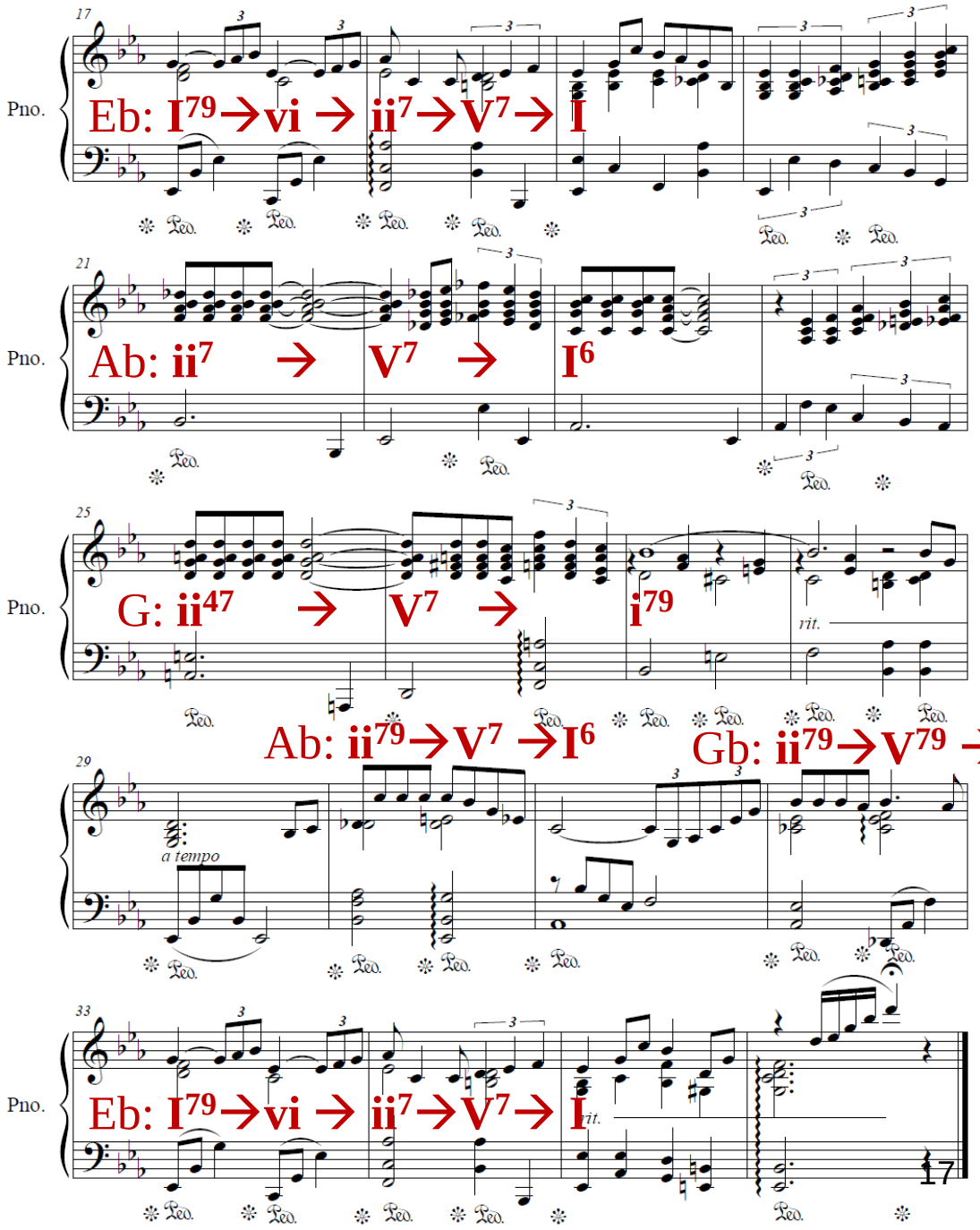
(I) = deceptive cadence

Exposition (repeat)



Exposition (repeat)

Development

Recapitulation

(I) = deceptive cadence