

## A Classic from Pittsburgh

Module 7 of *Music: Under the Hood*

John Hooker  
Carnegie Mellon University

Osher Course  
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## Outline

- Biography of Erroll Garner
- Analysis of *Misty*

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## Biography

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



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## 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.



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## 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

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## 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*.



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## 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](#)

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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

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### Classic form

[Audio file](#)

Exposition

Exposition (repeat)

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Exposition (repeat)

Development

Recapitulation

**Appealing Melody**  
[Audio file](#)

Naturally shaped melody due to descending notes

C to Bb  
D to C  
Bb to Ab  
Ab to G

Jump of major 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> in minor 7-9 chord

Jump of minor 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> in minor 7-9 chord

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Jump of minor 7<sup>th</sup> Eb to Db

Jump of major 7<sup>th</sup> Eb to D

Db to C  
D to C to Bb

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[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

Basic jazz progression: I vi<sup>7</sup> ii<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> I  
 Jazzed up a bit: I<sup>6</sup> vi<sup>7</sup> ii<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> I<sup>6</sup>

Major triad  
Minor 7  
Dominant 7

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

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[Audio file](#)

Exposition

Ab: ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → I<sup>6</sup>      Gb: ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → (I)

Some say Db results from modal interchange with mixolydian

Eb: I<sup>6</sup> → vi → ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → (I)      Eb: II<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>6</sup> → I<sup>maj7</sup>

(I) = deceptive cadence

Exposition (repeat)

Ab: ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → I<sup>6</sup>      Gb: ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → (I)

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Exposition (repeat)

Development

Recapitulation

(I) = deceptive cadence

Eb: I<sup>7</sup> → vi → ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → I

Ab: ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → I<sup>6</sup>

G: ii<sup>4</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → i<sup>7</sup>

Ab: ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → I<sup>6</sup>      Gb: ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → (I)

Eb: I<sup>7</sup> → vi → ii<sup>7</sup> → V<sup>7</sup> → I

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