#### **ABSTRACT**

#### THE COMPOSITIONAL STYLE OF TAYLOR EIGSTI

By

### Donghee Kim

#### May 2015

Jazz pianist Taylor Eigsti is one of the most spot-lighted jazz musicians today. He has played with many jazz luminaries, such as Dave Brubeck, Esperanza Spalding, Joshua Redman, James Moody, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Chris Potter, Christian McBride, Gertchen Parlato, Ambrose Akinmusire, Julian Lage and many more. Eigsti has also been recognized as a remarkable writer for his Grammy-nominated album *Lucky to Be Me* in the category of Best Instrumental Composition in 2006, orchestral works, and the theme music on the film *Detachment* (2011). I will analyze his compositional style using two of his compositions: "Magnolia" and "Midnight after Noon" from his latest album *Daylight at Midnight* (2010). Eigsti's asymmetrical phrasings, unusual chord progressions using common tones, and various harmonic rhythm displacements will be discussed in the project. Lastly, I will compose an original tune within his writing style to represent the unique colors of Eigsti's sound.

#### THE COMPOSITIONAL STYLE OF TAYLOR EIGSTI

## A PROJECT REPORT

Presented to the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music

California State University, Long Beach

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of the Requirements for the Degree
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#### **PREFACE**

New York-based pianist and composer Taylor Eigsti (born in 1984) is one of the most accomplished musicians in the jazz world today. Eigsti has been recognized internationally for his clear and punchy touch, rhythmic phrasing, and innovative improvisational storytelling. He plays in a number of different groups, such as the Kendrick Scott Oracle, Eric Harland Voyager, Chris Botti Group, Dayna Stephens Group, Gretchen Parlato Group, and in many other settings. He has also collaborated with a myriad of classical professional orchestras and youth orchestras including the Indianapolis Symphony, Sacramento Philharmonic, Boston Youth Symphony, San Jose Youth Symphony, and many others. In addition to his performance career, he has shared his passion for jazz knowledge with young jazz musicians at schools such as the University of North Texas, Berklee College of Music, UC Berkeley, University of Northern Colorado, NYU, and many more. Some of his compositions have been recognized, including the theme music of the film *Detachment* (2011) starring Oscarwinner Adrien Brody, 2006 Grammy-nominated album Lucky To Be Me for Best Instrumental Composition and Best Jazz solo, and a number of orchestral works. Eigsti has seven albums as a leader: Tay's Groove (1999), Live at Filoli (2000), Taylor's Dream (2001), Resonance (2003), Lucky to Be Me (2006), Let It Come to You (2008), and Daylight at Midnight (2010).

This project investigates Eigsti's compositional style in his latest album *Daylight* at *Midnight*. There are eleven tracks which include his arrangements and original compositions. Personnel on the album includes: Taylor Eigsti (piano and electric pianos), Becca Stevens (vocal), Harish Raghavan (acoustic and electric bass), Eric Harland (drum set and percussions), and Julian Lage (acoustic and electric guitar). In the album *Daylight at Midnight*, there are two original compositions which best represent his compositional style: "Magnolia" and "Midnight after Noon." These compositions are co-penned with vocalist Becca Stevens, who wrote the lyrics for both songs. His distinguishable style of writing is characterized by various harmonic rhythm displacements, unusual chord progressions using common tones, and asymmetrical phrasing. In this project, scores including melodies, rhythmic hits, and chord progressions will be transcribed from both compositions. An analysis of each will reveal the form, chord changes, harmonic rhythm displacement, and odd phrasing utilized by Eigsti.

The overall goal of this project is to adopt Eigsti's style of writing and produce an original composition using his techniques. The composition will reflect his compositional style including seven bar phrasing, unusual chord progressions using common tones, various harmonic rhythm displacements, and poly-phrasing between guitar lines and chord changes. The instrumental setting of the original song will mimic the song "Magnolia," which is written for voice, piano, guitar, bass, and drums; the vocal part will be excluded in the original composition.

The project is significant because, while Taylor Eigsti has been widely recognized in the jazz world in the last several years, his music has not been thoroughly analyzed.

This thesis will provide readers with an overview of Taylor Eigsti's compositional style and how one might compose in his style of writing.

#### CHAPTER 1

#### TAYLOR EIGSTI

New York born and San Francisco Bay Area bred artist, Taylor Eigsti (born in 1984) is one of the most talked-about jazz musicians today. When he was growing up, he was exposed to a great collection of music that his parents had, which included Dave Brubeck, Earth, Wind and Fire, Tony Bennett, The Manhattan Transfer, Gene Harris, Oscar Peterson, David Benoit, as well as various contemporary jazz players, and music from other genres. Eigsti started playing piano at age four, inspired by his sister, a jazz and rock pianist. By the time he was eight years old, he had already started performing at public venues and local restaurants. Eigsti had an opportunity to open for his mentor David Benoit at Sunset Gardens in Menlo Park, and in 1997 at age twelve, he was invited to play with Dave Brubeck at the Mountain Winery. At that point, Dave Brubeck became another great music mentor to young Eigsti.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Jazz Online, "Q&A: Taylor Eigsti.," Jazz Online: The Voice of Jazz, December 7, 2010, accessed November 1, 2014, http://jazzonline.com/qa/qa-taylor-eigsti.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Taylor Eigsti, "Taylor Eigsti Biography," Taylor Eigsti, accessed November 1, 2014, http://tayjazz.com.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> David L. Beck, "Teen Bopper 16-Year-Old Phenom Taylor Eigsti is Making Waves in the World of Jazz," *San Josè Mercury News*, October 4, 2000.

Even though he was mainly drawn to jazz, he had studied classical piano for seven years, beginning at age ten.<sup>4</sup> Young Eigsti was also interested in composing music, and he wrote his first orchestral work "The Beginning of the End" at age fourteen.<sup>5</sup> The young prodigy was accepted to the University of Southern California as a presidential scholar. However, he dropped out of college when he was a sophomore and began to pursue his professional career in music.

Eigsti has been participating in notable groups and musicians regularly, such as Julian Lage, Gretchen Parlato, Kendrick Scott Oracle, Eric Harland Voyager, Dayna Stephens Groups, and Chris Botti. He also had opportunities to record or perform with various jazz luminaries like Dave Brubeck, Esperanza Spalding, Joshua Redman, James Moody, Nicholas Payton, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Chris Potter, Diane Schuur, Michael Nesmith, Christian McBride, Ernestine Anderson, Joe Lovano, David Benoit, Lee Konitz, Dave Douglas, Ambrose Akinmusire, Hank Jones, John Clayton, Frederica Von Stade, Caroline Campbell, Christian Scott, and Red Holloway, among many others. Eigsti has been featured as a soloist and guest composer in symphony orchestras, such as the San Josè Chamber Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony, Sacramento Philharmonic, Boston Youth Symphony, Reno Philharmonic, San Josè Youth Symphony, Tassajara Symphony,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Richard Scheinin, "Former Jazz Prodigy Taylor Eigsti Moves Deeper into Symphonic Music with His New Concerto," *San Josè Mercury News*, May 15, 2012, accessed November 1, 2014, http://www.mercurynews.com/ci\_20628912/former-jazz-prodigy-taylor-eigsti-moves-deeper-into.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Scheinin, "Former Jazz Prodigy Taylor Eigsti Moves deeper into Symphonic Music with His New Concerto."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Taylor Eigsti, "Taylor Eigsti Biography."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid.

and done multiple collaborations with Peninsula Symphony Orchestra, Oakland East Bay Symphony, and Bear Valley Festival Orchestra.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to performing, Taylor Eigsti has been known to share his tremendous knowledge of music and life with many young jazz students at various universities and music institutions. He has been on the advisory board of Stanford Jazz Workshop, and has taught for fifteen years. Eigsti has been featured as a guest artist at the Brubeck Institute at the University of the Pacific a number of times, and also as a residency artist at the Jazz School Institute in Berkeley, California. He has led numerous master-classes and clinics, taught at music camps, and done music workshops at many different colleges, such as the University of North Texas, UC Berkeley, Skidmore College, Berklee College of Music, NYU, San Josè State University, University of Northern Colorado, and many more. 11

Eigsti leads his own groups, Free Agency and Bay Area Trio. He has recorded seven albums as a leader: *Tay's Groove* (1999), *Live at Filoli* (2000), *Taylor's Dream* (2001), *Resonance* (2003), *Lucky to Be Me* (2006), *Let It Come to You* (2008), and *Daylight at Midnight* (2010). Although his second album *Live at Filoli* was not

<sup>8</sup> Taylor Eigsti, "Taylor Eigsti Biography."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Taylor Eigsti, *Tay's Groove*, Tay Jazz Records, 1999, CD; Taylor Eigsti, *Taylor's Dream*, DIW Records, 2001, CD; Taylor Eigsti, *Resonance*, Bop City Records, 2003, CD; Taylor Eigsti, *Lucky to Be Me*, recorded on May 14 to 16, 2005, Concord Jazz, 2006, CD; Taylor Eigsti, *Let It Come to You*, Concord Jazz, 2008, CD; Taylor Eigsti, *Daylight at Midnight*, Concord Jazz, 2010, CD.

released, it was recorded when Eigsti subbed for the legendary Marian McPartland in the Jazz at Filoli. His first record with the label Concord Jazz was *Lucky to Be Me*, which was a Grammy-nominated album in the categories of Best Instrumental Composition and Best Instrumental Solo in 2006<sup>14</sup>. In this project, selections from the latest album *Daylight at Midnight* will be discussed and analyzed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Beck, "Teen Bopper 16-Year-Old Phenom Taylor Eigsti is Making Waves in the World of Jazz."

 $<sup>^{14}</sup>$  Taylor Eigsti, "Taylor Eigsti Biography."

#### CHAPTER 2

#### ANALYSIS OF EIGSTI'S COMPOSITIONS

#### The Album *Daylight at Midnight* (2010)

Taylor Eigsti released his seventh album *Daylight at Midnight* as a leader on Concord Jazz Records in 2010. The album features the inventive singer-songwriter Becca Stevens on vocals, Harish Raghavan on bass, Eric Harland on drums, and Julian Lage on guitar as a guest artist. In the album, Eigsti explored various genres of music and played them lyrically in his own sound. He covered modern music groups like Mutemath and Coldplay, and some innovative singer-songwriters, such as Feist, Rufus Wainwright, Nick Drake, Imogen Heap, and Elliott Smith. He also included a song titled "Secreto" by a Spanish composer Federico Mompou.

Eigsti spoke about how he chose the songs for this album:

I specifically wanted to try to pick tunes that would not be structured around just the ability to "blow" over them—I wanted to try to make the role of the piano more focused on expressing lyrical ideas and interacting with a voice, and have the soloing be imbedded within some less typical structures to some of the songs. 15

He also co-penned two songs, "Magnolia" and "Midnight after Noon" with Becca Stevens, and those tunes will be discussed in this project.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Jazz Online, "Q&A: Taylor Egisti."

## "Magnolia"

The second track of the album *Daylight at Midnight*, "Magnolia," represents Eigsti's unique innovative compositional style. The song is in 3/4 meter until it reaches the Outro, and the tonal center is based on C Lydian scale, even though it shifts to E major many times. The instrumentation for the song is voice, piano, guitar, bass, and drum set. It displays his unique style of writing: seven bar phrasing in the A section, six bar phrasing in the E section, and mixed meters in the Outro.

The form of the song is constructed as follows: Intro, Verse 1, Verse 2, Interlude, Verse 3, and Outro. And there are five different sections with variations defined by their chord progressions.

Form	Sections	Meter
Intro	A, A	3/4
Verse 1	A, A, A', B	3/4
Verse 2	A, A, A', B, C	3/4
Interlude	Dx4, C'	3/4
Verse 3	A, A, A', B, B, C, C	3/4
Outro	Ex14, E'x2, E", A	Mixed meter with 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4

FIGURE 1. The form of "Magnolia."

The main chord progression for this song is in the A section. It is a seven bar phrase with four bars of Cmajor7#11 and three bars of E6. This odd phrasing gives audiences a feeling of something unusual and unexpected, and it creates an interesting

mood for the song. There are two common tones (B and E) between Cmajor7#11 and E6. Eigsti uses those common tones to make the chord changes flow naturally. In addition, the common tones work throughout the song with the exception of the D section.

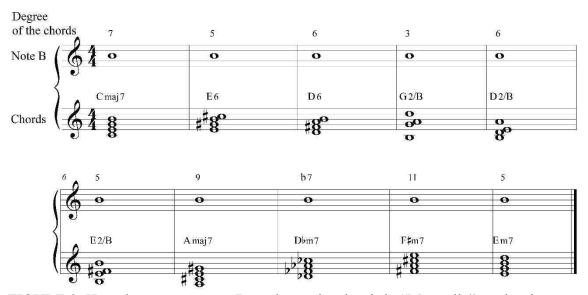


FIGURE 2. How the common tone B works on the chords in "Magnolia" as chord tones or tensions.

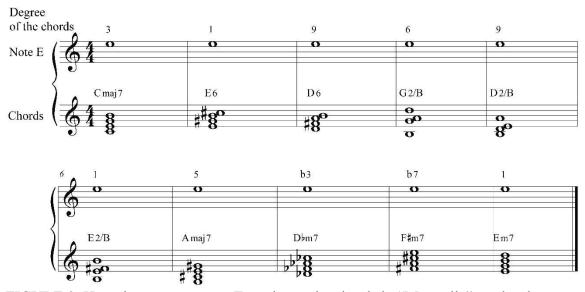


FIGURE 3. How the common tone E works on the chords in "Magnolia" as chord tones or tensions.

The D section has a poly-phrasing between the melody lines and the chord progression. Poly-phrasing means two or more phrasings are happening at the same time. The D section contains two-bar-phrased lines on guitar, piano and voice and three-bar-phrased chord progressions on bass. When it gets to the fourth bars of the D sections in the Interlude, the music feels like it shifted because the fourth bar is the last bar of two-bar-phrased lines and the first bar of three-bar-phrased chord changes.

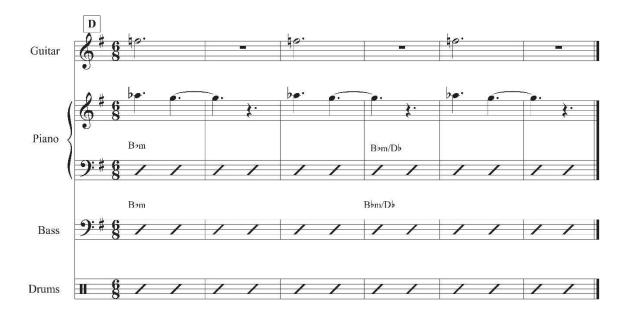


FIGURE 4. Two-bar-phrased lines and three-bar-phrased chord changes within six bar phrasing in "Magnolia."

The E section in the Outro, 4/4 and 3/4 meters are constantly changing while maintaining the same value of the quarter note. It keeps the music interesting with the steadiness of 4/4 and the flowing of 3/4, and Eigsti makes it even more compelling by using 2/4 and 4/4 time signatures in the E' section. The music comes a full circle at the end, by returning to the A section.

## "Midnight after Noon"

"Midnight after Noon" is the last track on the album *Daylight at Midnight*. The main key center is Db major, and the root Db is also the common tone for the entire song. The instrumentation of the song is piano, mellotron (electric piano), bass, drum set, and voice. Eigsti's common tone usage for the entire song and various harmonic rhythm displacements make the song fascinating. The form of the tune is identified by the Piano Intro, Intro, Verse 1, Solo, Verse 2, and Outro.

The common tone throughout the entire song is Db, even though the chord progression of the song is not entirely in the key of Db major. Note Db works on every chord in the song as a chord tone or as a tension.

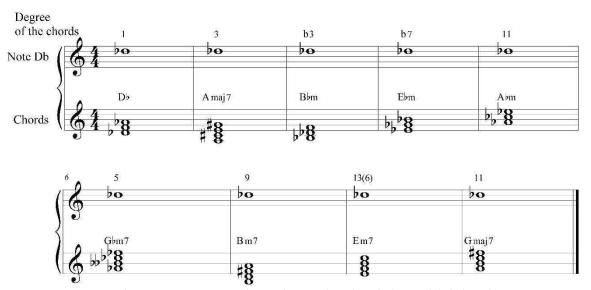


FIGURE 5. How the common tone Db works on the chords in "Midnight after Noon" as a chord tone or a tension.

Eigsti demonstrates three different harmonic rhythm displacements in the A section. Common harmonic rhythms in cut time are on the down beat, such as beat one,

or beats one and three. However, interestingly, Eigsti displayed harmonic rhythms to beats two and four, two, and four in the A section. Measure number 3, 4, and 6 in Figure 5 show a harmonic rhythm displacement on beat two and four. Measure 5 shows a harmonic rhythm displacement on beat four, and measure 9 is an example of a harmonic rhythm displacement on beat two.

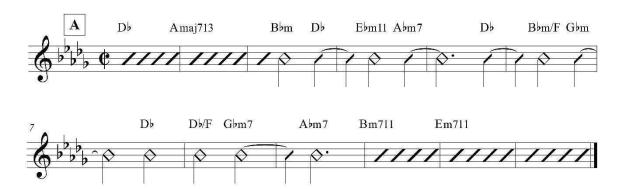


FIGURE 6. A section of "Midnight after Noon," to demonstrate different harmonic rhythm displacements.

Using a common tone throughout the entire song and using different harmonic rhythm displacements give the song "Midnight after Noon" the vivid colors of Eigsti's music.

#### CHAPTER 3

#### ORIGINAL COMPOSITION "THE WINTER DREAM"

The original composition "The Winter Dream" will reflect some of Eigsti's writing style such as: using a common tone as a chord-tone or a tension note of the chord, seven bar phrasing in the A section, and switching meters while maintaining the same quarter note pulse. The instrumentation is the same as "Magnolia" excluding a vocal part.

The first element of Eigsti's compositional style applied to the tune is the use of a common tone throughout the chord changes of the piece. In "The Winter Dream," note C is the common tone for the entire chord changes except the last three chords in B section. I made an exception to the sequence of using a common tone throughout to change the color of the music in the B section.

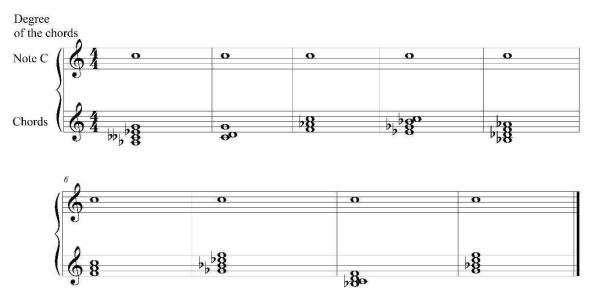


FIGURE 7. How the common tone C works on the chords in "The Winter Dream" as a chord tone or a tension.

The second element of his style of writing applied to the tune is odd-bar phrasing and harmonic rhythm displacement. The A section is constructed with two bars of Abmaj7, two bars of C9/G, two bars of Fm, and one bar of a harmonic rhythm displacement. In the 6/8 meter, the most common harmonic rhythms are on beat one, or beat one and beat two; the rhythmic subdivision is usually grouped by three eighth notes per beat. However, in the last bar of the A section, the harmonic rhythm is displaced with three quarter notes, which is against the standard of 6/8 meter which is usually two dotted quarter notes. It creates a different pulse for only one bar and then the music goes back to regular 6/8 pulse.



FIGURE 8. A section of "The Winter Dream," to demonstrate seven bar phrasing and harmonic rhythm displacement.

For the last element, a poly-phrasing is applied to the Outro. The chords in the Outro change every bar, but grouped by the first three chords and second three chords. The first three chords in the Outro are in an ascending chord progression, and the second three chords are in a descending chord progression. It is considered a three-bar-phrased chord change. In the meantime, the guitar plays a two-bar-phrased line.

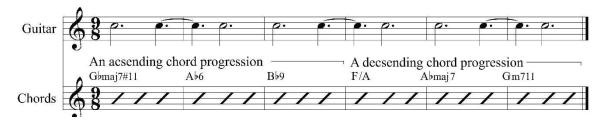


FIGURE 9. Two-bar-phrased line and three-bar-phrased chord changes within six bar phrasing in "The Winter Dream."

#### CHAPTER 4

#### CONCLUSION

This project investigated Taylor Eigsti's compositional style and how one might compose in his style of writing. Odd bar phrasing, chord changes using common tones, poly-phrasings, and various harmonic rhythm displacements were found in his music: "Magnolia" and "Midnight after Noon." The element of his compositional style completes the fascinating colors of Talyor Eigsti's music. Even though he may not be the first one to utilize these techniques of writing, he certainly creates his own unique sound through these techniques and his incredible playing. Among the techniques of his writing, chord changes using common tones are the most characteristic element of his writing style. The original song might not sound the same as Eigsti's music, however it has a similar feel using his techniques of odd bar phrasing, chord changes using a common tone, and poly-phrasing. Taylor Eigsti is still growing up as a legendary jazz musician and developing his own color and sound. There is nothing more exciting in the world like witnessing someone who has already accomplished so many things and will go further.

**APPENDICES** 

# APPENDIX A GRADUATE RECITAL PROGRAM

# Program

Be-bopDizzy Gillespie (1917-1993)
DoxySonny Rollins (1930)
Blue in Green
Flor de lisDjavan (1949)
You Took an Advantage of Me
Tomato KissBill Evans (1929-1980)
All the songs above are arranged by Donghee Kim
INTERMISSION
When the Sun goes down at the Lake
Stars
The unknown
Will be fine
The Winter Dream

# APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTIONS

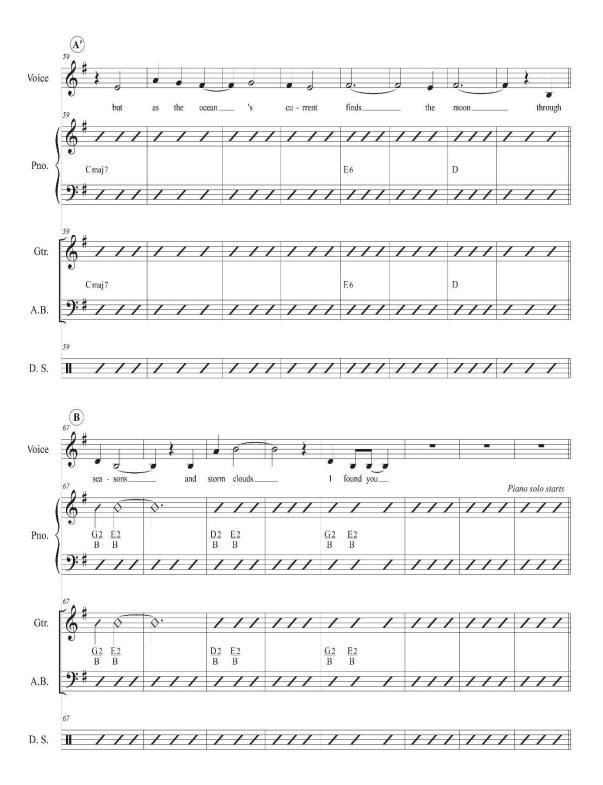
"Magnolia"



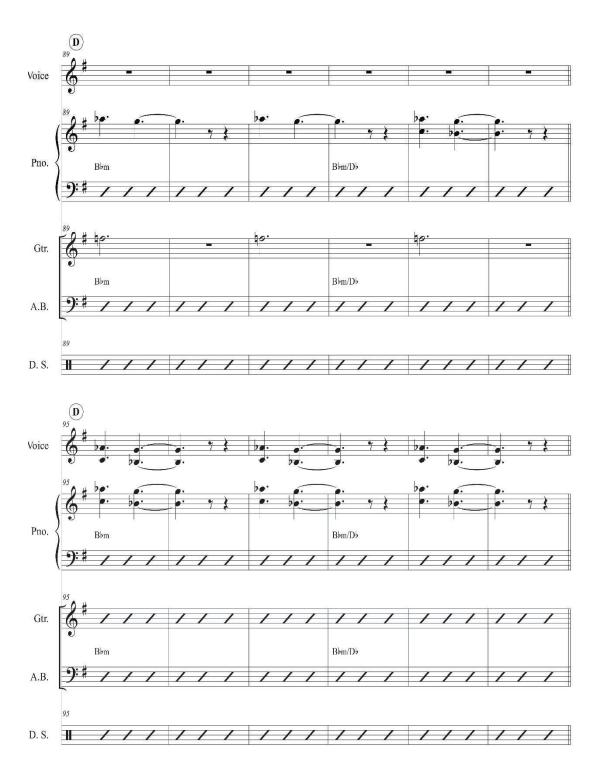


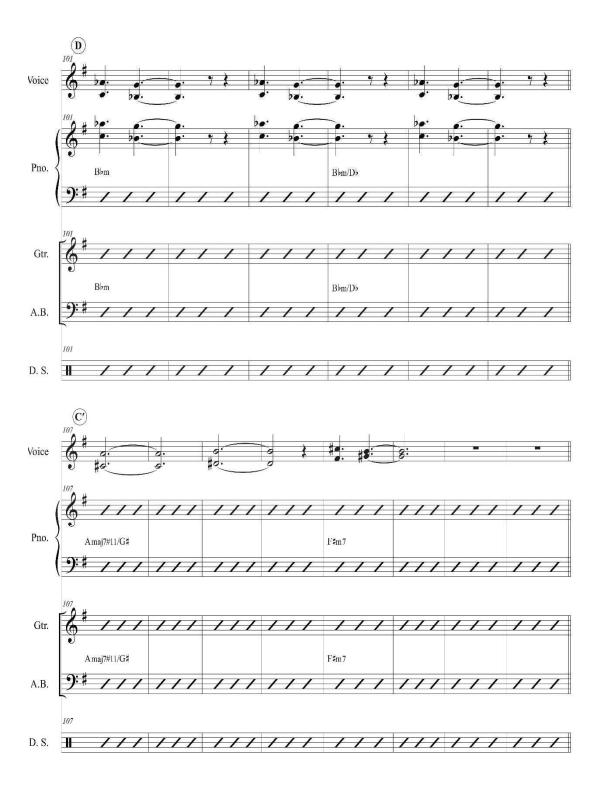






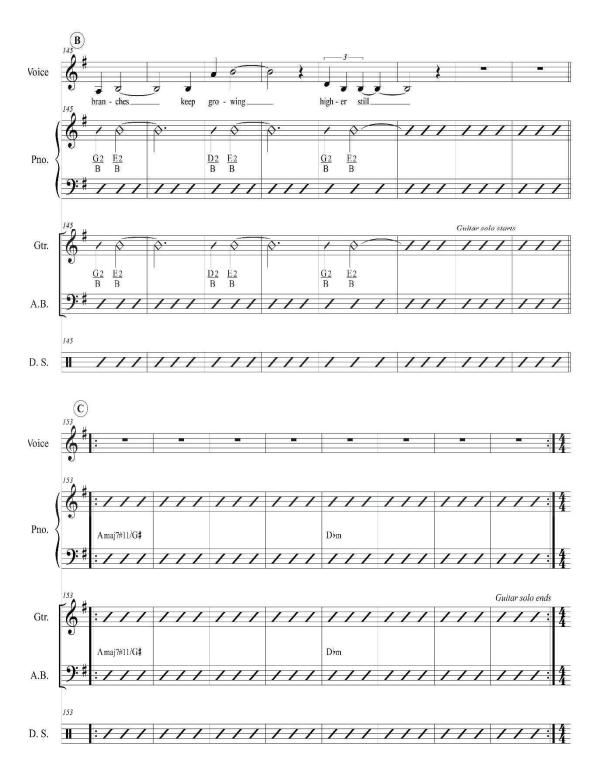


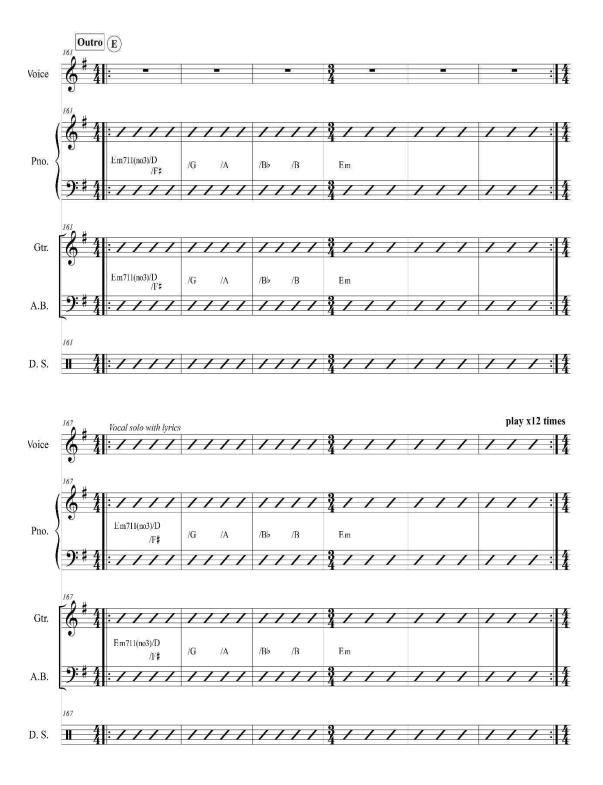


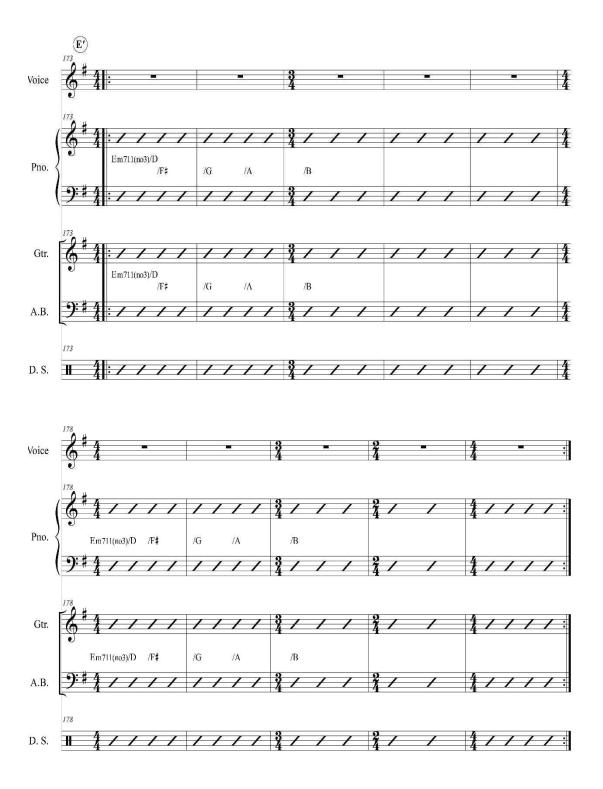


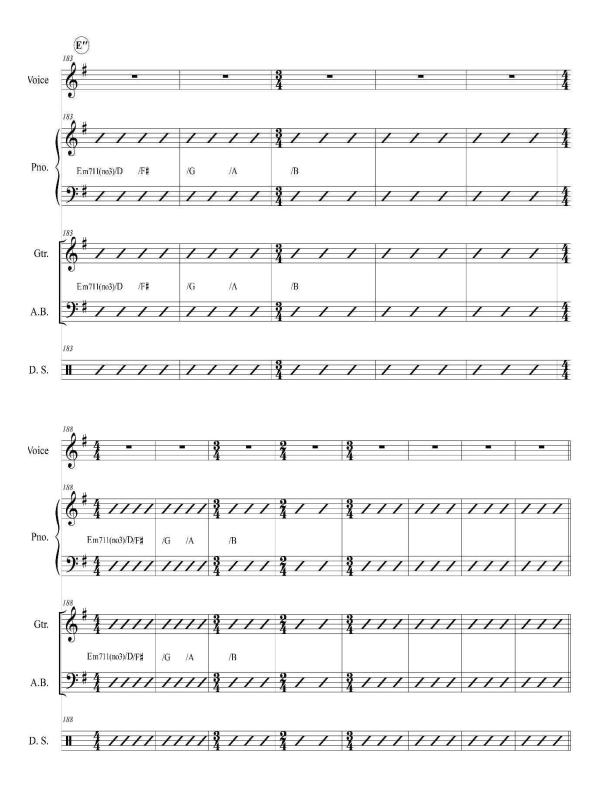


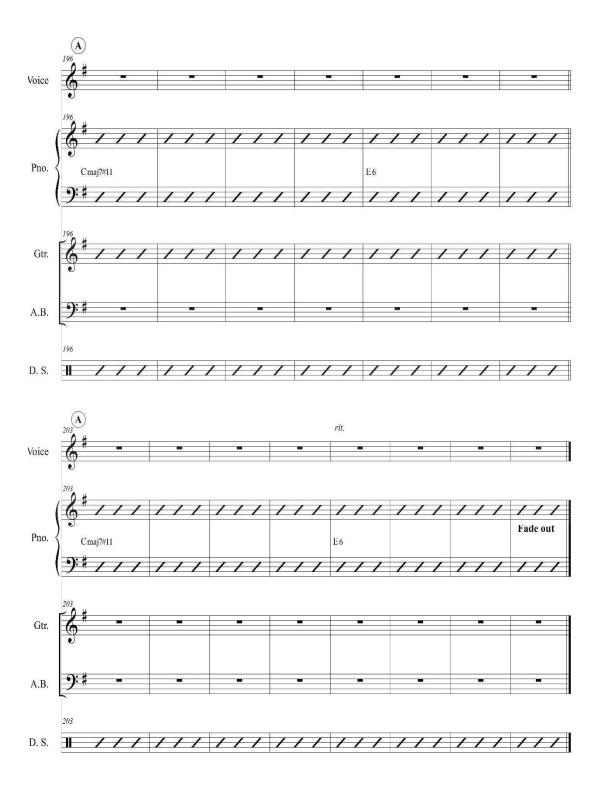












"Midnight after Noon"

#### Score

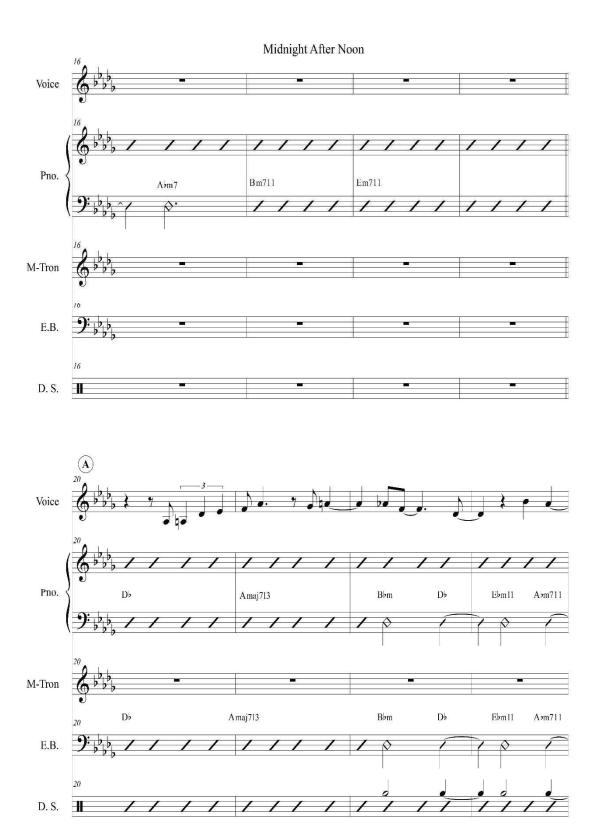
# Midnight After Noon



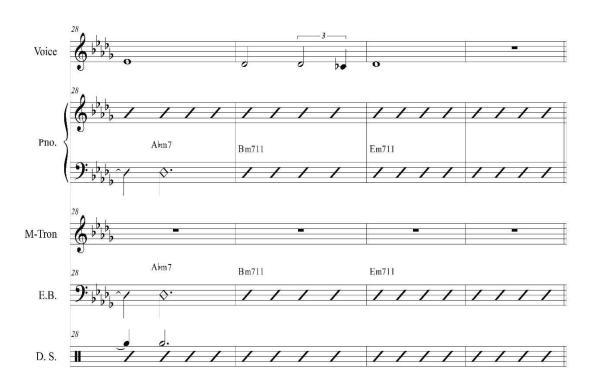
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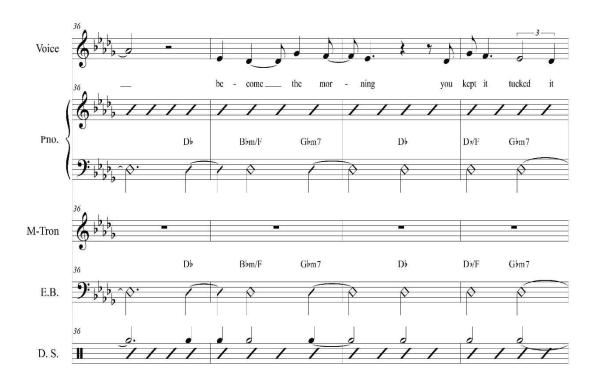
D. S.



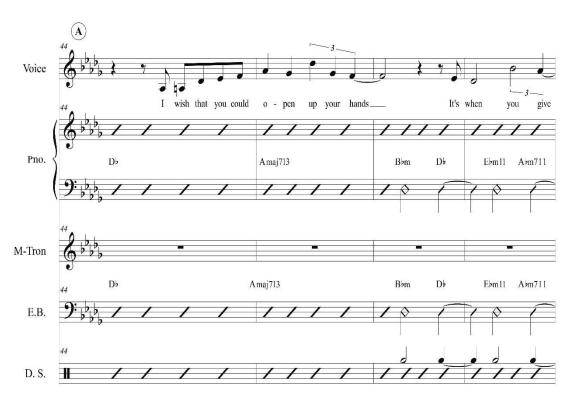




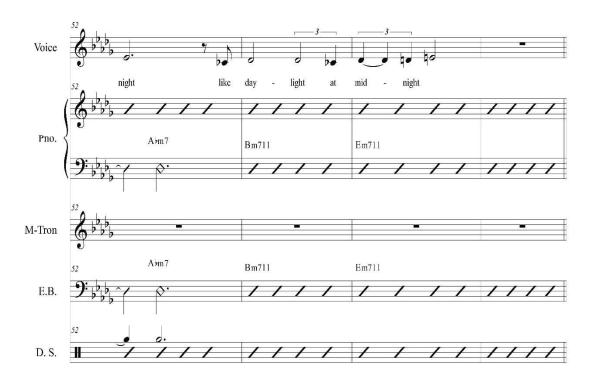




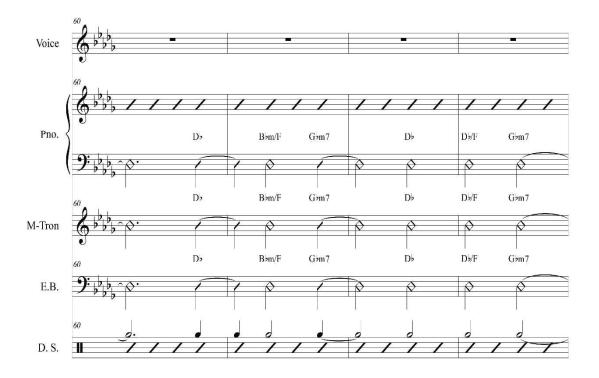




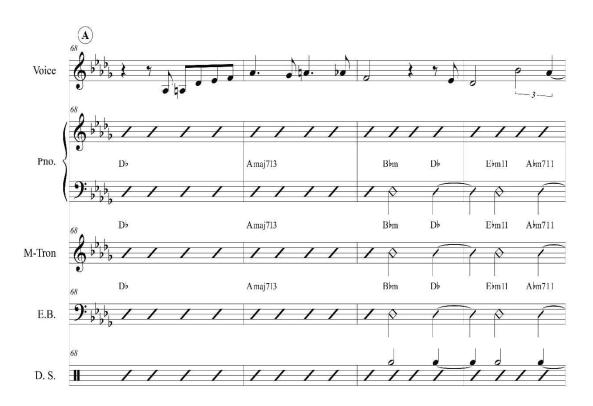




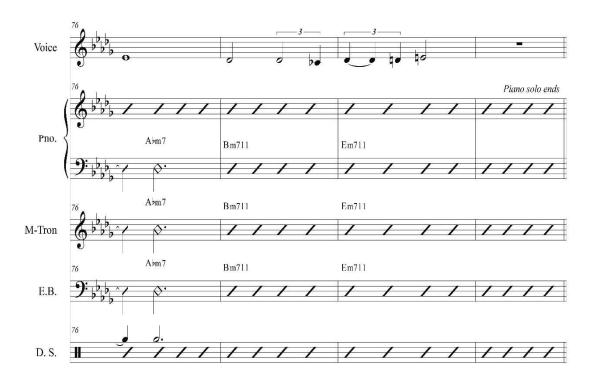


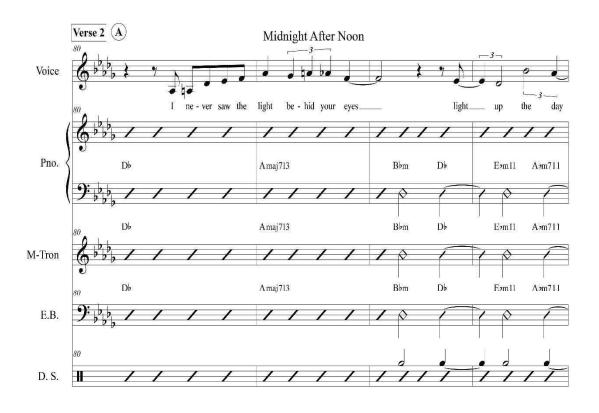






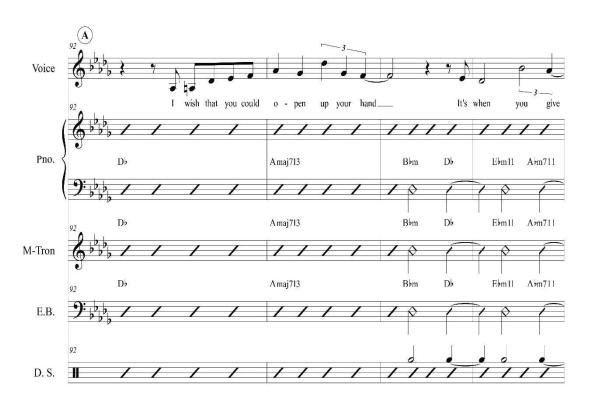






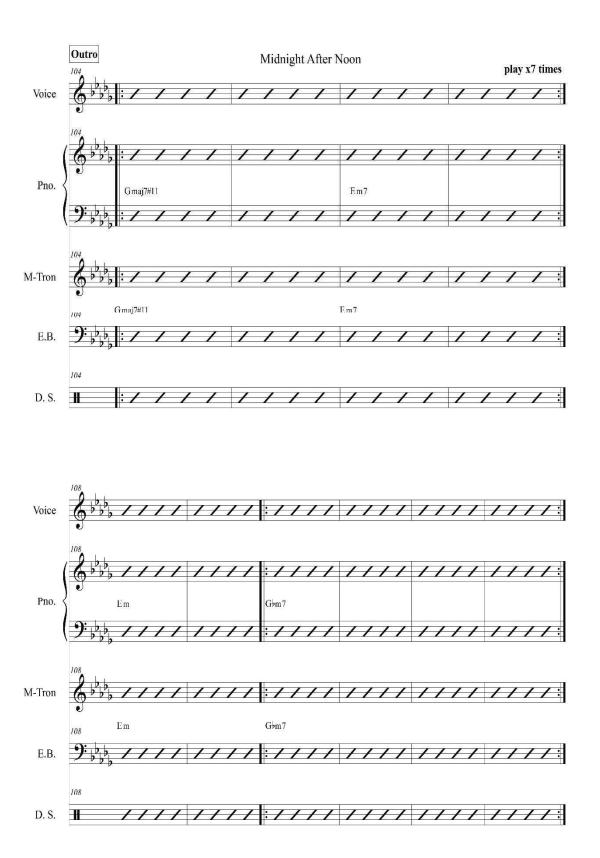


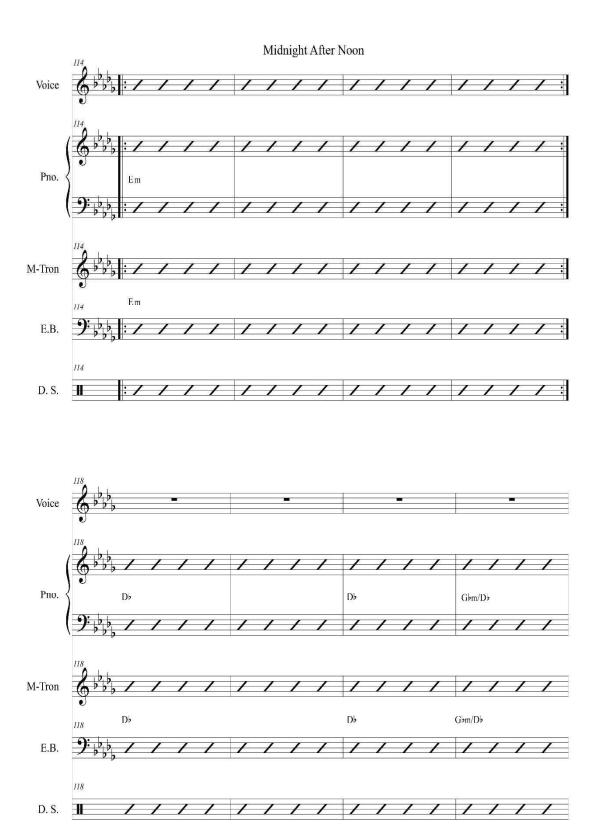














### APPENDIX C

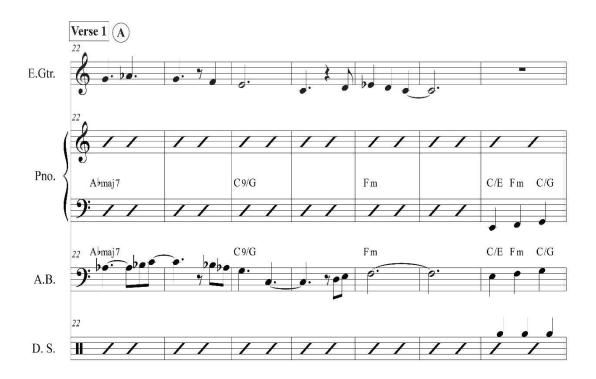
ORIGINAL COMPOSITION "THE WINTER DREAM"

Score

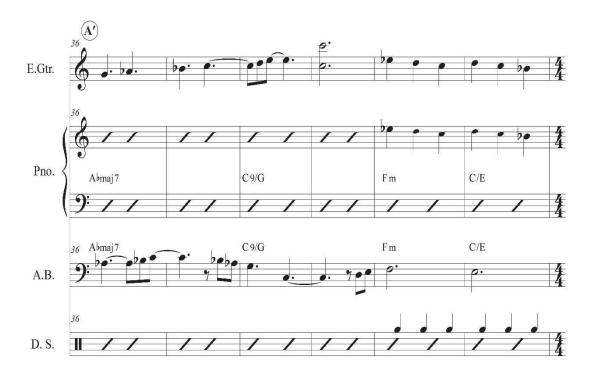
## The Winter Dream

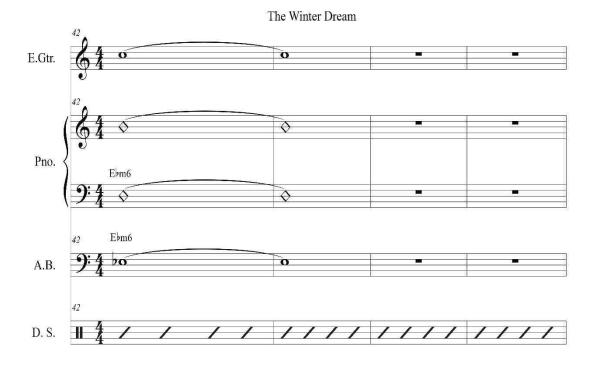


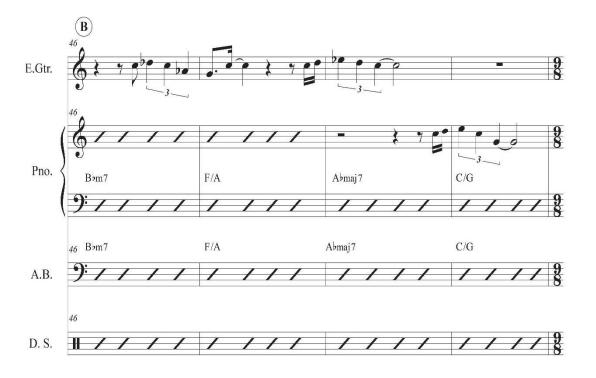




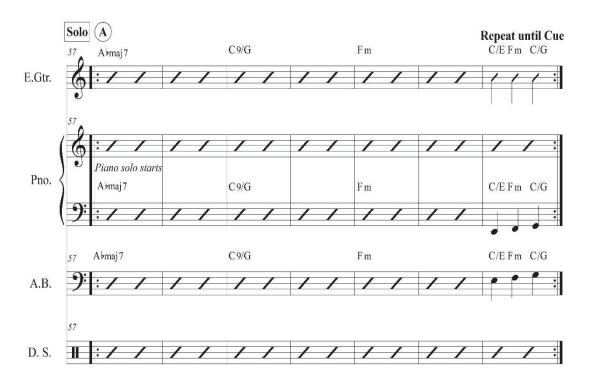




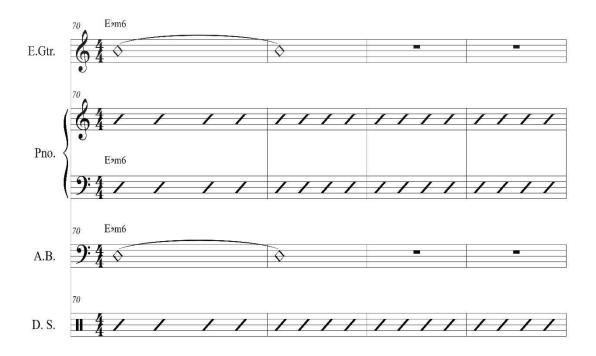




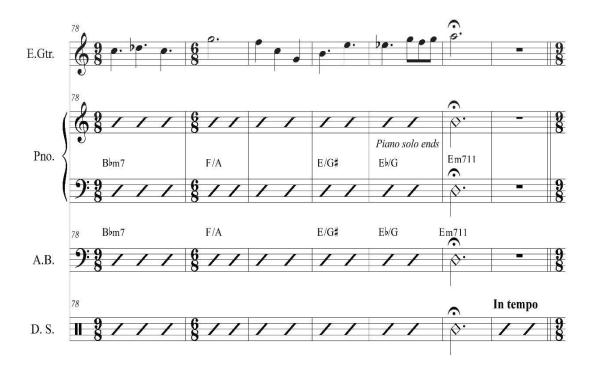


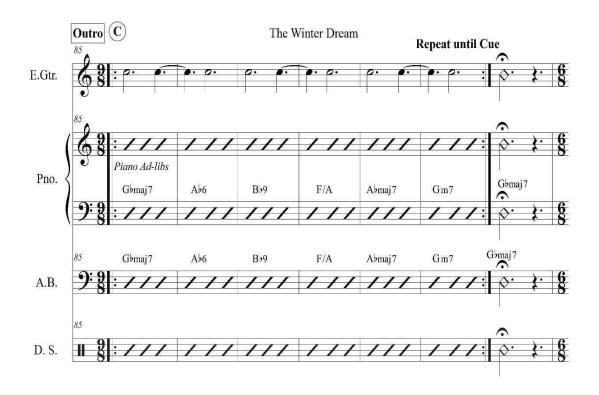


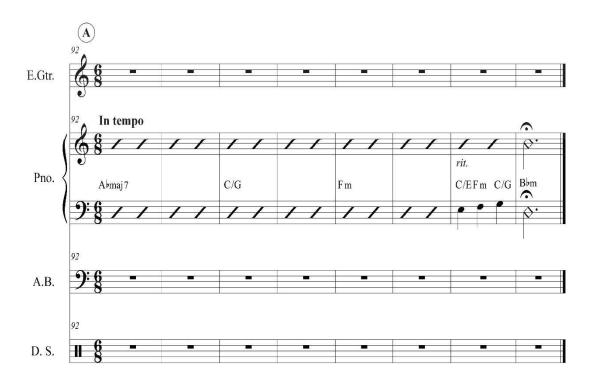












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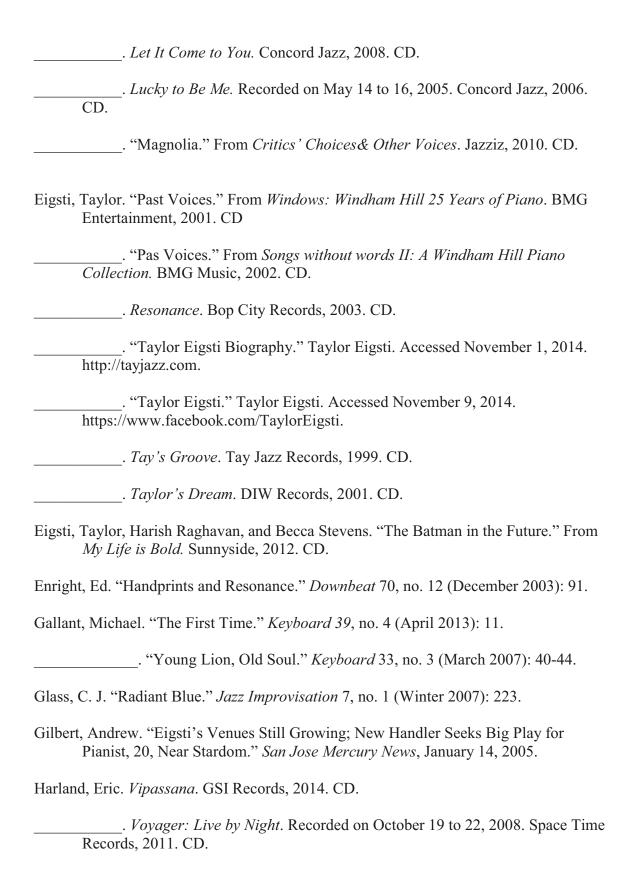
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