

Phil Woods and Cherokee

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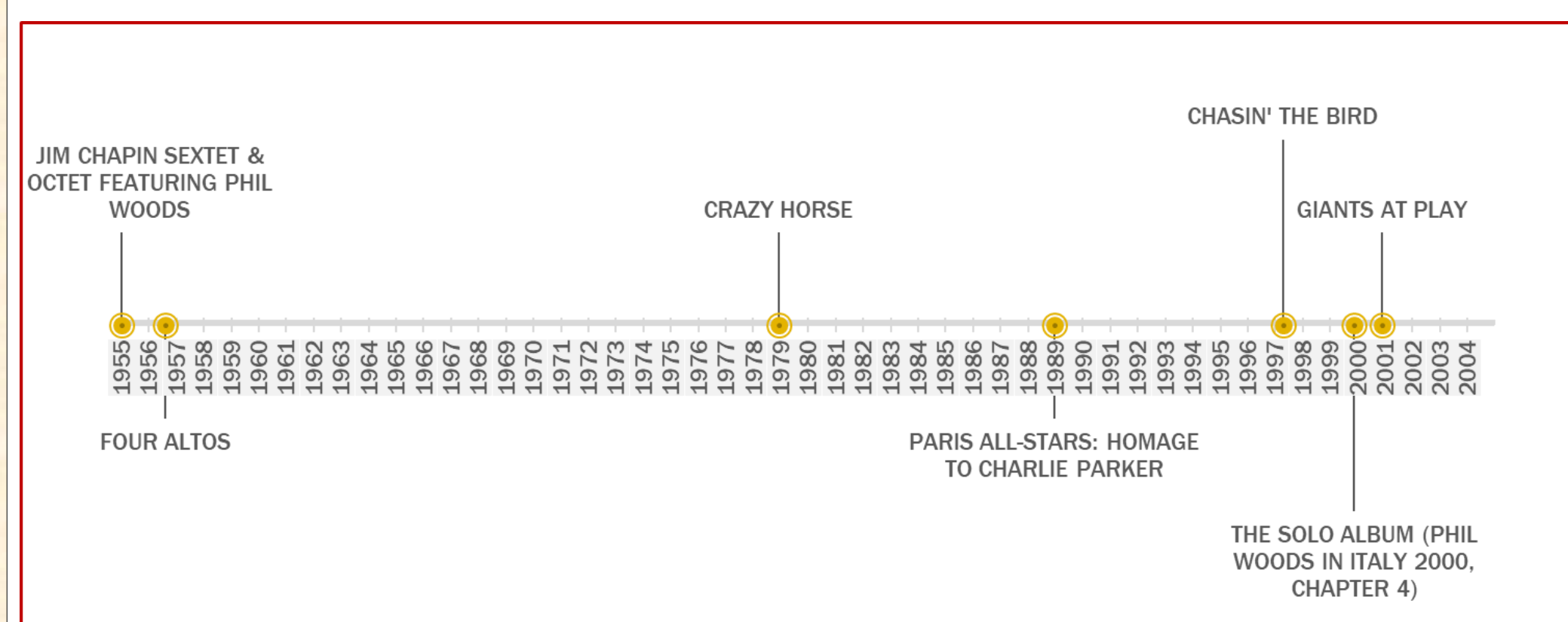
Introduction

Phil Woods was known as a consummate musician and keeper of the bebop flame throughout his long career. The influence of Charlie Parker on Woods's development is clear and was acknowledged by Woods in several interviews. In particular, Woods stated the only Charlie Parker solo that he transcribed in its entirety and committed to paper was Parker's timeless solo on "Ko-ko." "Ko-ko" is based on the harmonic chord progression of "Cherokee," the up-tempo tune with its difficult bridge that was a jam session favorite and provided a means of demonstrating an improviser's technical prowess.

Woods recorded Cherokee or tunes based on Cherokee's chord progression several times throughout his long career. The first recording was in 1955 and the last was in 2003, spanning a large portion of Woods's recorded legacy. This presentation will examine transcriptions of seven solos based on Cherokee. The majority of the solos feature Woods on his usual alto saxophone, but one solo includes a solo on soprano saxophone, which Woods featured in the 1970's. Additionally, while Cherokee is typically played in 4/4 meter at a fast tempo, one version at a more relaxed tempo in 3/4 meter will be examined.

Each solo demonstrates Woods's mastery of the bebop language, including such devices as approach notes, ii-V patterns and tritone substitution. Throughout the examination of the seven solos, the development of Woods's improvisation style over the course of his 50+ year recording career and the seminal influence of Parker's "Ko-ko" solo will be highlighted.

Timeline



Phil Woods discussing Ko-Ko

"In Springfield we listened to records and jammed all the time, but the only Bird solo I ever copied was 'Koko,' although I would cop licks and analyze," he recalled. (DownBeat, 2007)

"'Koko' was the most important jazz record I heard," Woods says. "I was playing with a kid band, Carmen Ribozza [sic] and His Rhythmaires- my father use to call us Carmen Ribozza and his Riveters because we were so awful! I brought the record to a rehearsal, and they really put me down. I walked out in tears in the middle of the rehearsal-my first political statement!" (JazzTimes, 2005)

"I brought my first copy of Koko to the rehearsal of the kid band I was with: Carmen Ravosa and His Rhythm Aires. (My father always called us Carmen Ravosa and His Riveters.) They laughed like hell when I put it on the turntable in the living room, where all the aunts and uncles would sit and watch us rehearse. I cried as I told them that it was the greatest music ever. I quit the band and went home and listened to Bird for hours on end. I went through three copies of Koko that year" ("Under Dark Stars", Gosvami, 2008)

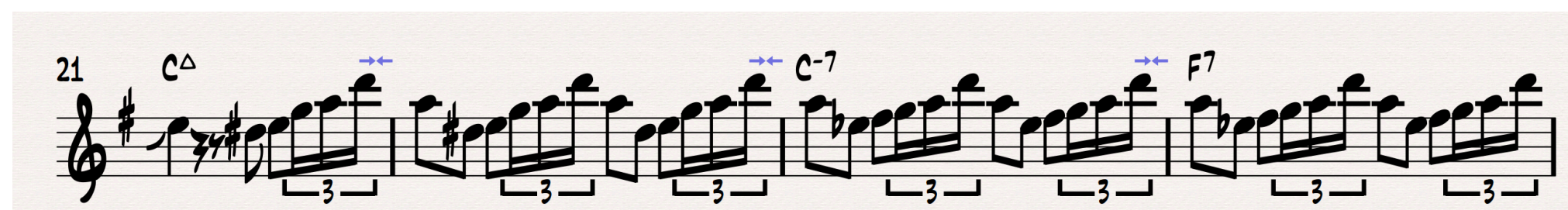
Examples of Ko-Ko influence

Triplet Phrase:

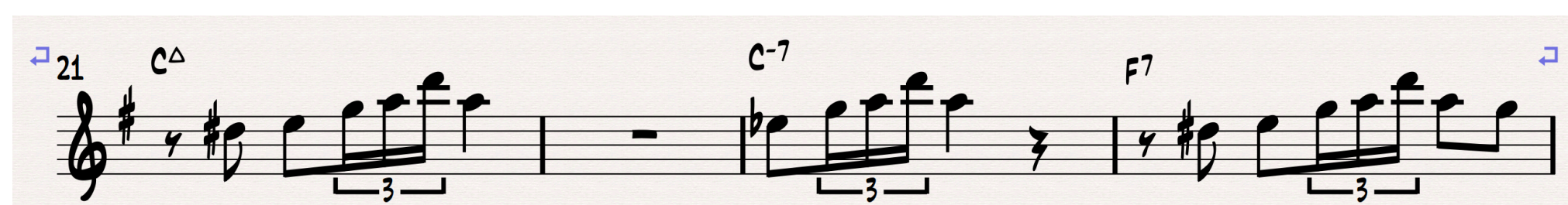
Ko-ko:



Paris All-Stars:



Giants At Play:



Examples of Ko-Ko influence

Baroque Phrase (harmonic minor):

Ko-ko:



Kokochee:



Solo Album:



Tea For Two Phrase:

Ko-ko:



Solo Album:



Chasin' The Bird:

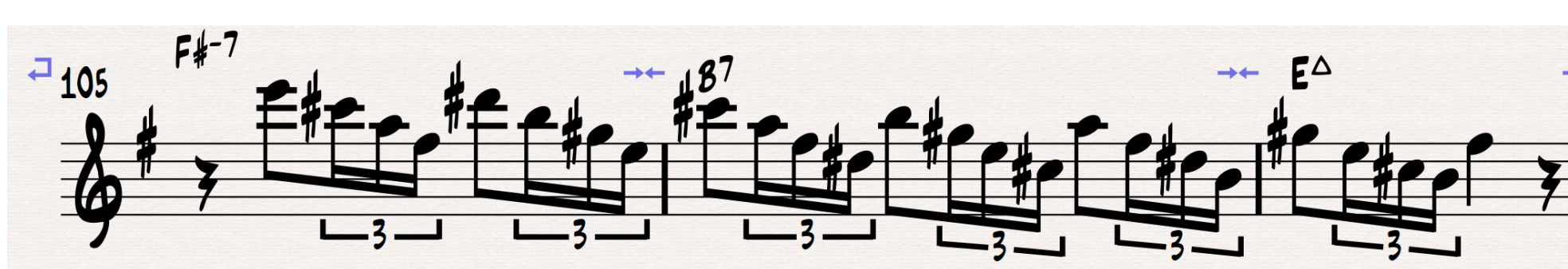


E major ii-V Phrase:

Ko-Ko:



Giants At Play:



Additional Solo Material

Favorite G major pattern:

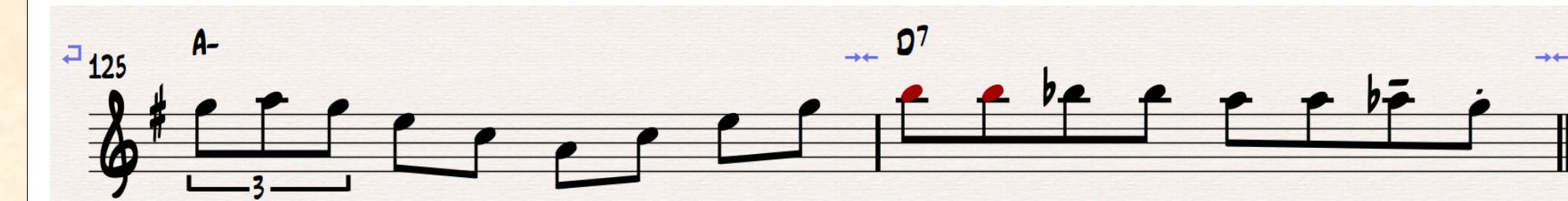


Favorite Ending:

Paris All-Stars:



Solo Album:



Chasin' The Bird:



Summary

- Examined 7 recordings spanning close to 50 years of Phil Woods's discography
- Traced the influence of Charlie Parker's seminal recording of "Ko-ko"
- The solos illustrate all of the techniques of bebop including bebop scales, chromatic approach notes, enclosures, tritone substitutions, etc.

More Information

For more information about Jeff Rzepiela, visit his website containing over 75 solo transcriptions and several big band arrangements:

www.scooby-sax.com